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ROOTS

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BY

EDUARDO
ZAMACOIS

Translated from the Spanish

THE VIKING PRESS
NEW YORK

19 29

LAS RAICES

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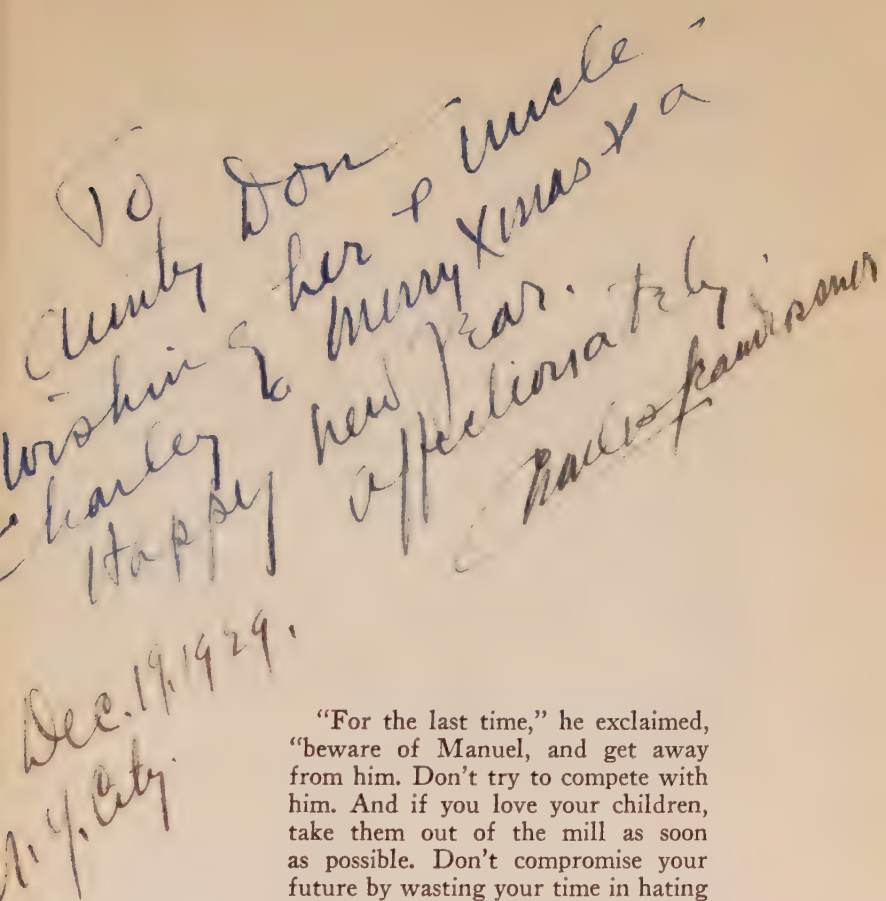
PRINTED IN U. S A.



"For the last time," he exclaimed, "beware of Manuel, and get away from him. Don't try to compete with him. And if you love your children, take them out of the mill as soon as possible. Don't compromise your future by wasting your time in hating those who know how to hate much better than you do, because your hatred will fall upon them. . . . Flee! . . . Before Cain killed Abel he should have killed himself; but he did not do it, and since then Cain kills Abel every day. Don't forget that now, as in the days of the patriarchs, the roots of life are watered with the blood of brothers."

I

ALREADY shaved and dressed in his Sunday suit of black corduroy, Leandro Santoyo rolled a cigarette and raised it slowly to his lips, savouring it in advance. He lit it, and without taking the trouble to say good-bye to the woman busy in the kitchen over the children's breakfast, he stepped firmly into the outer hall and left the mill.

The mill stood nearly a mile from town, under the shelter of an Arabic bulwark, and erected on a small rocky hill shaped like a spur. At its foot the Vaquerizo river, an offshoot of the Guadalsazar, rushed turbulently from its source, only to spend itself and be absorbed by the thirsty earth a few miles below. From this bifurcation and from the nature of the region, which abounded in evergreen oaks, the town took its harsh, sonorous, pure Castilian name of Carrascal del Horcajo, or "Oakwood by the Forking."

The small town, made up of adobe houses with broad tiled roofs blackened by the weather, snuggled capriciously on both sides of the ruined walls of a powerful old Roman castle. About eight hundred souls inhabited the town. In the course of centuries, without rhyme or reason, the population had gradually increased, and for the sake of economy each new inhabitant had taken good care to build upon what he found ready to hand. The labours of man aided by the corrosive action of time had finally split the old castle to pieces, only a few fragments of wall remaining, turned golden by the sun.

Slowly the moats had become winding streets, the counterscarps had been turned into yards, the desolate emptiness of the towers, without doors or roofs, had become animal sheds, and, twisted in a thousand ways, the ancient courtyards of the castle, where once the cattle of the plain had found refuge during sieges, had become small fantastic squares.

The best part of the town lay at the centre and above the place where the old castle had been. It was a wide and irregular space, one of its sides made up of the red façade of the town hall and a wall, broken only by an old Moorish door. "Don Profundo," the learned man of the town, maintained that this wall had been part of a former mosque, but now it was only used by the men as something against which to play handball. The other three sides were closed in by rows of two-story houses fronted by ancient covered corridors, lined by square pillars, under which all the social and business intercourse of the town took place. Paulina's Inn was there, its owner, "La Repetia," having been shrewd enough to turn one of these porticoes into a café. The pharmacy of licentiate Diosdado Barral was there too, and daily from four to eight in the evening its owner transformed it into a little club where dominoes was played. There, too, was the barber shop of Lucas, who could not only give a man a good shave, but was also an adept in the art of applying leeches and extracting tooth-stumps. There, also, the hardware shop, where almost anything one wanted could be bought; the grocery store of Antonio Sanchez, known also as "El Migao," and many other enterprises.

It was this area which served as bull ring on the thirteenth of September, the day of Saint Eulogio, patron of the town. Outside of it the dwellings, nearly all of one story, and with no other opening in front than the door, were scattered about and, overrunning the old fortified declivities, descended towards the level peace of the plain. Most of these humble houses retained the dark colour of the clay of which they were built, and were topped by ostentatious roofs projecting about

a yard beyond their walls. Their hermetic Moorish fronts were broken by prison-like windows above the ground, adorned with flowers grown in pots and tins. Near each door a large stone or a piece of ancient column served as a bench. The tortured angular streets, some of them ruggedly inclined, were covered during the rainy season with an ill-smelling black mud, in which hogs enjoyed wallowing. Late in the summer, great quantities of straw that collected on the threshing floors, and which the wind and the carts scattered everywhere, littered the streets.

The curving foot-path through which Leandro Santoyo walked briskly in the fresh blush of this summer morning, inclined softly upward and, upon reaching the first few houses of the town, passed under an arch with a keystone, half wrenched from its place, which hung over the heads of the wayfarers with mortal threat. A strong light illuminated the landscape with rich sombre colour. The banks of the Guadalsazar and the Vaquerizo, flanked by elms, black poplars, and acacias, diverged like the legs of an open compass, and drew two green lines over the yellow width of the plain. Between these, crowning a hillock, was the village. Away from it, and encircled by the green of an orchard, rose the high walls of a nunnery of the Sisters of St. Clara; and in the same direction, high above a hill, the tombstones of the cemetery glittered white. The road which led to it was lined by black cypresses, which bowed reverently before the wind, like cowled men feigning a genuflection. The last one of these, small, and separated from the rest, looked exhausted by the climb. Further down, towards the south, the fields of grain spread undulating, uniform, endless, sunk in the enchantment of a golden haze, until they reached the line of the horizon, over which the sky rested its magnificent blue. On the opposite side, as if to protect the valley from the rigours of the north, the earth, covered with evergreen oaks and furze bush, bulged suddenly, forming twin hillocks. One of them was called Stark Mound because of the metallic

reflections of its sides at sun-down, and the other, to which a crowning tower gave a martial air, was named the Hill of Fatigue.

Upon entering the town, Leandro Santoyo greeted Paco Camacho, who was trimming the fetlocks of a donkey under the eave of his shed.

"Have you seen my brother?" asked the miller.

"He went by about an hour ago," answered Paco.

Santoyo continued upwards, his cowhide Sunday boots making a loud noise against the irregular cobblestones. He was a man of about forty, tall and well built. His dark eyes, large and intelligent, and the white gleam of his teeth in his clean-shaven face arrested the attention, as did also a peculiar white lock which sprang from his forehead and traced a curve on the sleek ebony of his pompadour.

Although the neighbourhood had long been awake, the houses remained so silent that they seemed uninhabited: not a song or laugh or the rumble of a dispute could be heard. Only at intervals was the silence broken by the muffled grunts of the pigs, who had turned the streets into a pen, or perhaps by the hustle of a bevy of pigeons skimming over the chimney cowls.

Leandro Santoyo, arriving at the church of Saint Martin, before which the narrow street widened pretentiously into a square, exchanged a smile with the wife of Don Isidro Perez Cadenas who, though it was still quite early, was already installed in her balcony.

The quiet, monotonous life of Doña Gerarda incarnated the soul of the place. Never had she been seen reading or embroidering. Why should she? . . . She suffered neither from nerves nor from boredom, and had no need to amuse herself, least of all by soiling her hands with vulgar toil. She fed on the sluggish sap of her own heart and refused any extraneous nourishment. Hers was one of those withdrawn, self-absorbed souls which never ask for help; one of those spirits which grow old with eyes turned inward, because

nothing outside deserves attention; one of those vigorous, individualistic wills, which carry within themselves their horizons and their altars.

The house which she had inhabited since her birth had the aspect of an old prison. Its windows were placed asymmetrically on the dark façade; the wide door was ennobled with the escutcheon of a cardinal; and its black decaying balcony was adorned on Palm Sundays with the vivid gold of a new branch. That balcony, shaded by an eave, epitomized the long, unmoving life of Doña Gerarda. As she sat and gazed through it, her hair had turned from gold to white; and for almost sixty years her black pupils had registered unweariedly the small meagre square in front. She had looked at it all her life because she had nothing better to contemplate; because if she could not turn her eyes towards it, she would have found no other use for them. Her balcony was her joy, her "theatre" as she called it; the only tie indeed which held her to this world; and from her elevation she pried anxiously into what, though it was hardly worth looking at, she never tired of observing.

A woman would go by trembling under the weight of a grape basket full of clean clothes, and she would think:

"Isabel . . . returning from her washing."

In late August she would notice the swallows flying to and fro, and hear them calling one another, and she would sigh:

"Autumn is coming. . . ."

Across the street the teacher, Don Lotario, would appear, and she would say:

"School is over. It must be five o'clock. . . . "

Although she never left her dwelling, not even to attend mass, the changes of the weather were an obsession with her. "Will it be warm today?" . . . "There will be too much wind." . . . "I have not yet seen Lolita, the pianist, go by; it must be cold." . . . And so it always went in her immutable life.

Meanwhile the acacias which the Town Council had planted around the square were growing, and the old lady perceived with fear that the one set at the foot of her balcony had shot up so high that it would soon deprive her of the pleasure she had expected to enjoy until the very last day of her life. That acacia was her rival; and through it she came to know the guilty craving for revenge. Criminal thoughts embittered her heart. But could she get rid of her enemy without laying herself open to trouble with Don Bernardo, the mayor?

She wrote Barral, the chemist, with whom she was on friendly terms, begging him to send her secretly some poison which she could inject into the tree to dry it up. She received what she required, and for some days thereafter she left the house every evening towards dusk and, kneeling near the hated tree as if hunting for something, she applied the deadly liquid to its trunk. The acacia, which had begun to sprout in the spring, soon sickened; its tendrils dried up; and when it finally died after a few months of agony, it was uprooted by a disposition of the township. Thanks to this, happiness returned to Doña Gerarda; and her eyes continued fastened on the miserably dirty and empty square which, ironically enough, had never held anything worthy of attention.

Upon turning the church corner the miller saw an urchin about twelve years old running out of a door, followed by an old woman. Once free of her grasp the fugitive stopped at the nearest corner, anxiously leaning his unkempt head against the wall. The old woman, grim and olive-skinned, with something of a knotted root about her hands and aquiline face, began to shout at him:

"Come back, you! Damn the milk I fed you! Come here, you ungrateful thief, you Jew; if you don't want to be skinned alive, come here!"

She took a step towards the boy, who retreated a little. Whereupon she redoubled her curses.

"You wicked son, you'll die of the thrashing I'll give you.

You'll have to come sooner or later. Hunger will bring you back. And as soon as you show your nose at the door I'll beat you to death. I swear it; look!"

She kissed her thumb and index finger in the form of a cross. Fearfully watching his mother, the child remained silent, with bent head; he did not seem inclined to yield to the terrible order to return, nor could he make up his mind to go away. The woman insisted:

"Go back to your father, you scoundrel! You'll be the death of me. Go! You know he's in the garden waiting for you."

As his mother advanced towards him, the boy, not daring to answer, drew back. His wild shyness and his silence seemed to raise a wall before him. Convinced at last that she would not be able to approach him, or reduce him to obedience with threats, the scowling woman began to throw stones at him, which the boy managed to avoid by deft dodging. But she could throw well and quickly, and finally succeeded in hitting him on the head. The wounded boy, gushing blood, tumbled and fell on his knees. He managed to get up, however, and crying out more in anger than in pain, he ran off and disappeared. Santoyo was furious at the brutal attack.

"Old witch!" he exclaimed, "what did that boy do to you to make you treat him that way? What kind of punishment is that? Are you a beast? Have you no heart?"

The old woman straightened up and cast at him a look of which he missed the full significance until later.

"What I'm sorry for," she mumbled angrily, "is not having killed him on the spot. The blood in his body is my own; I can take it from him if I want to."

Under a prominent forehead her little eyes burned with a consuming dry flame. Her beak-like profile and dark sunken cheeks gave her the look of an owl.

"It's none of your business," she continued. "That son of mine is killing me. Every day instead of helping his father

in the fields, he goes fishing with other scoundrels. Do you think that is right? I don't. I'll kill him; either he obeys me or I'll kill him! . . . Fine presents children make! Better they were never born. From the time they come they give nothing but trouble; first they are useless; and when they grow up, they only go off to war. God, my God!" she muttered to herself, "why were we ever born?"

Silently she turned home, leaving with Leandro the ache of her last forlorn words. Impressed, though still angry, the man went his way with his mind roiled by ideas picked up by chance from books, the true meaning of which he could not quite gather. He could not understand the savage scene he had just witnessed, yet he seemed to detect in it a racial trait; that vengeful mother who stoned her son and in God's name swore to flay him; that absence of pity; those eyes hard and dry like the earth on which they opened; and that pain of centuries, with which the fierce little woman lamented having been born—all fitted tragically into the stark and miserable expression of the whole picture.

"When there is no water in a country," thought Santoyo, "there can be no tenderness in the hearts of its sons."

Turning the idea over in his mind he came to the square where he found his brother playing ball. Though he had three opponents, he was nevertheless winning. Quick, vigorous, intent, all nerves, Manuel Santoyo put into the play a sanguinary passion. To be the first was his motto, and he would gladly have broken his arms for the sake of victory. About a score of youths, some with wide-brimmed black hats, others with berets, and all of them in shirt-sleeves, were watching the contest. Not a word was spoken, and on each face, in the stoic lines, poised severity itself. The glare of the sun was reflected against the players from the front of the ruined mosque and shed a white light upon the deserted porticoes. The rarefied air of the sky, of intensest blue tone; the irregularly shaped square, with empty doors opening on it, and houses of an earthy colour; the grey dusty grounds,

which seemed covered with fine ashes; and the front of the church against whose whitewashed surface the dark severe figures were drawn in violent relief, made an excellent Castilian aquatint.

The players were ready to engage in the last round. They perspired freely and in the absence of handkerchiefs wiped their faces with their shirt-sleeves. Manuel alone remained shrivelled and dry.

"Go to it!" some one shouted.

The ball started straight against the sunlit wall. A hard bounce threw it far back, but Manuel caught it in the air and returned it obliquely. The strenuous contest was resumed. Untiringly responding to the sudden changes of the struggle, the contestants grouped themselves or separated from each other, advanced or retreated, ran and jumped, their silent shadows speeding against the whiteness of the wall like rope dancers possessed by demons. Dust, light, passion, silence—that was Castile. The ball darted back and forth, in powerful rebounds, from the ground to the wall; its movement governed the motions of the four players, more surely than a director could have done. Held aloft by their joint efforts —the personification of their individual pride and self-respect —the grey ball, dancing in the diaphanous blue air, looked like a flame. Suddenly Manuel, who had caught it almost at the foot of the wall, made it rebound with such deft unexpected art, that not one of his rivals was quick enough to return it, and the victory was his. Then turning towards the spectators without a word, not even bothering to say goodbye, he picked up his jacket, threw it over his shoulder, and looked at his brother.

"I'm going to the barber shop," he said. "Will you come along?"

"All right," answered Leandro.

Manuel started out first. He was already over forty, but retained intact the elasticity and strength of his youth. His body, tall and well shaped, was the reflection of his harsh,

intractable nature. He barely lifted his heels from the ground when he walked, his stride was that of an Indian, quick and silent, and he held himself so stiff and straight, that it was a miracle he did not fall backwards. He had a small head, cross-cut with scars, which marked white lines on his reddish, closely cropped hair; his nose was hooked, fine and small; his face of a flaming copper colour; his lips were so thin that they were hardly visible; and his eyebrows and eyes had turned the colour of the golden wheat which he cultivated. He spoke very little but each one of his gestures was so well directed that it was worth a phrase. His body itself was expressive. Long arms and legs, stretched by continual movement; fibrous, obstinate and self-assured, with muscles as hard as his heart was unmoving, Manuel Santoyo was one of those manly men of whom it may be said that they carry their souls in their skeletons.

Lucas's barber shop, like a deep narrow cave of unplanked floor and arched roof, and with no other source of light than that which filtered through the door, overflowed with people. The grey walls, poorly whitewashed, were adorned with an image of Saint Martin placed prominently forward and a little mirror which had lost almost all of its mercury on account of the humidity. From a few hooks, placed in a row, hung the basins and the ox tails for cleaning the combs.

The barber's chair—there was only one—was placed near the door, and at its side was a little table, on which the scissors, the powder boxes, a few bottles of Florida water and other toilet articles were scattered in a disarray hardly suggestive of cleanliness. At the chair Lucas, the proprietor—a thin, dark man, with a face indicating little friendliness—had worked in his shirt-sleeves throughout all seasons for upwards of twenty years. The monkish chair, of oak and hide, was reserved entirely for those who represented the aristocracy of the town, on whom Lucas wanted to wait personally. The other clients were attended to by the four sons of the

owner, the oldest of them barely seventeen. And these clients had to sit as best they might on a bench, in a row, facing the wall, in order to occupy less space.

When the Santoyo brothers entered, Lucas had finished shaving Don Blas, the physician. He had already washed and powdered his customer's face, and was getting ready to comb his hair. Manuel seeing the chair occupied, hesitated. Lucas noticed it.

"Don't go," he said, "I'll soon be through."

And referring to the ball game, he asked:

"Did you lose or win?"

"I won."

Manuel's small eyes, the colour of ripe grain, to which the golden lashes lent a metallic clarity, probed the room. Six men sat on the bench, of whom three were being shaved and another was having his hair cut; the other two waited their turn. They were country people, lean, with the long heads of the genuine Castilian, close-cropped hair and copper-coloured faces, and thin strong necks, bare like those of fighting cocks. All remained silent, with their lower lips thrust forward in a uniform gesture of contempt; an ethnic trait, expressive of a race which apparently does not think, nor feel, nor respond at all.

The doctor had gotten up and while he paid, Manuel Santoyo sat down.

"What will you have?" inquired Lucas.

"Hair-cut and shave and quickly."

"Is some one waiting for you?"

"No," answered Manual, "but you know I am not one of those who like to waste time."

Leandro and the doctor had started a conversation. Lucas, taking his time, placed a flimsy towel around Manuel's neck. He poured water in a cup to mix the soap, and when he thought the lather thick enough he applied it with his hand, this being the primitive procedure which to his mind softened the beard best. Shaving brushes had not yet arrived

in Carrascal del Horcajo. Suddenly Manuel looked at him in a surprised and angry manner.

"What are you up to?" he asked.

Lucas stopped short.

"Can't you see?"

"I want a hair-cut."

"I know it."

"Well, why don't you start then?"

The barber knit his brow; he replied seriously:

"You told me to shave you and to cut your hair, didn't you?"

"The other way around: I told you to cut my hair and give me a shave."

"Isn't it the same thing?"

"Of course not!"

Their voices grew louder. Equally proud, neither of them seemed inclined to yield. The others watched them and this attention whipped up their anger. Leandro, knowing the obstinacy and violence of his brother, looked at him nervously.

"I prefer to shave first," Señor Lucas reasoned, "because the hair can be trimmed better afterwards. That's the way to work and that's the way I like it best. Do you understand?"

"You're not here to please yourself," interrupted Santoyo violently, "but to do as you're told."

Lucas paled and a squall of hatred darkened his eyes. The feudal lord that all Spaniards, however humble, carry within them, had sprung to life. He felt himself a master, a corsair, a prince.

"I take orders from no one!" he shouted.

"Nor I!" answered Manuel, tearing the towel from his neck and rubbing the lather off his face.

Trembling, his face distorted, he rose to his feet. The desire to kill, so easily kindled in him, blew through him like a livid gust. Señor Lucas exclaimed:

"If you don't like it, leave it. And get out of my place!"

With a gesture he pointed to the door. Manuel Santoyo challenged him:

"If you are a man," he said, "come out and we'll fight it out."

Without a word—real men kill each other without rhetoric—Lucas snatched a razor from the table, and turned towards the challenger. Fortunately for both, Leandro and Don Blas held him, and wrestling with him, they pushed him to the back of the store. None of his sons, not even the youngest, seemed frightened. The others remained impassive; no one moved or said a word. Life did not seem to be worth a farthing to any one of them.

The doctor, who exercised considerable influence over all of them, exhorted Lucas to be prudent.

"Men don't kill each other for such trifles," he shouted. "And your family? Do you want to go to jail, you fool?"

The barber grunted, his bloodshot eyes fixed on the door, where, against the glare, Manuel Santoyo was still waiting for him in a challenging posture. It was obvious that the danger was not yet over. To dispel it, Leandro suddenly adopted a humorous way out.

"Nothing has happened here," he said to the barber. "You, doctor, please take my brother away; he respects you and will obey you. And you, Lucas, since you have the lather all ready, you can shave me."

The barber was slow in answering. Leandro added:

"Weren't you going to shave Manuel? Well, shave me, what difference does it make?"

Lucas glared at him:

"Thanks very much," he said, "but you don't need a shave."

"Of course I do," replied Leandro, turning towards the chair. "I look shaved, but not well enough to suit me. Hurry up, now. I haven't much time."

Lucas, with hands still trembling, consented, and thanks to the miller's tact the incident was ended.

From the barber shop Leandro Santoyo went to Paulina's Inn, afraid that his brother, in whom anger cooled slowly, would turn back and lie in wait for Lucas. In the corridor which was used as a café he greeted Don Diosdado Barral, the pharmacist, and inquired after his health.

"Don't speak of it!" answered the chemist with a gleefulness hardly in keeping with the pessimism of his words. "My stomach aches constantly; I have trouble with my liver; I can digest nothing; I suffer from insomnia. . . . Today I am stricken with rheumatism, tomorrow it will be the kidneys. I am like one of those old mattresses that lose their wool through their worn out corners. If it were not for my good humour . . . !"

And he added:

"Tell me, what has happened? . . . They tell me that your brother and Uncle Lucas tried to kill each other."

Leandro Santoyo related what had taken place and added by way of comment:

"The truth is that Manuel was altogether in the wrong. But who can control him? You know him."

Don Diosdado sighed, and with a malicious smile, said:

"Do I? . . . And I assure you that you do not resemble him at all. There is nothing in common between you, either physically or morally."

No one was better entitled than licentiate Barral to express an opinion. He was about the same age as the Santoyo brothers, and had been with them in a school whose master, an old-fashioned disciplinarian with an inquisitor's soul, one of those schoolmasters who never forget their strap and their ferrule, had almost flogged them to death. The friendship that had united the three boys was very close. In the fierce stone fights which the urchins of the town invariably organized on Sundays they had always fought together. One afternoon, however, on the Roman bridge over the Guadalsazar, Diosdado and Leandro were about to start a fight when Manuel appeared. "You'll have to fight it out with me," he

said. Diosdado, who laid claims to strength and courage, accepted the challenge, and they pitched into each other like wild young boars. Swinging at each other, biting, mouth against mouth, they fought hard for a few minutes, when suddenly Manuel, holding his rival around the waist, exerted all his strength, raised him high and threw him into the river where he was picked up a few minutes later with several damaged ribs and a broken leg. This bout not only twisted Diosdado Barral's bones awry but his future as well. If he could have had his way he would have become an actor, but his lame leg prevented it. One would expect that, since we find lame men in the world, the theatre, which reflects it, would have them too. But the public, though acknowledging with praise the life-like rendering of a simulated lameness, will never tolerate a genuine one. Fear of ridicule ruined his vocation. Then, to help his father, who was the physician of Carrascal del Horcajo, he took up pharmacy, a sedentary profession quite in harmony with lameness. As soon as he obtained his licentiate, he returned to the town, married Clara Luz Camacho and opened a pharmacy with the few thousand reals she brought with her.

His expansiveness soon won for Don Diosdado the friendship of the townsfolk, who recognized that the most amusing and pleasant thing about him was his lameness. Perhaps this misfortune, which he was keen enough to know how to play up in fun, sharpened his wits. For licentiate Barral could change himself from a small man into one two inches taller. He claimed therefore to be able to examine life from two different points of view.

"If you only knew," he would explain to his friends, "how agreeable this double life is. . . . My psychology is dual. To the common run of men legs are useful only for walking. To me they are useless in that way; but they enable me to find the true value of things. Each one of them represents a different criterion. I have examined myself carefully. When I stand on the short one, the most trivial obstacles of life

appear quite serious; my mental horizon narrows; I feel helpless, defenceless, with my soul full of question marks. My crippled leg is pessimistic and cowardly. But if I change my posture and climb upon my whole and heroic extremity, everything becomes dwarfed around me, my will becomes exalted, the darkness that harassed me disappears, and the difficulties which I had considered insurmountable fade altogether. That irritability which some people attribute to me is only skin deep; in truth, underneath, I am really tolerant; and I believe that my kindness is due to my lameness. They say that the Italian poet Leopardi carried his pessimism in his hunchback. Perhaps! I believe a crook in the vertebral column can induce a twist in your whole character. But lameness, on account of the very action which it imposes upon us, affects us differently. It suggests eclectic ideas, ideas of harmony. In the realm of morals, as well as in the physical world, the lame man is a decided enemy of the straight line."

This optimism of his was not at all so sincere and deep-seated as licentiate Barral would have it. Like his leg, the substance of his true life was broken, and neither the material satisfactions which surrounded him nor the love he bore his four children were enough to make him forget his passion for the theatre. His unfulfilled destiny saddened him. He who perhaps had been born to be a great actor, and to roam freely from country to country, finding love and applause everywhere, was forced to vegetate in a blind alley. And thus, notwithstanding his nobility, he nursed within the deepest crevices of his heart an inextinguishable hatred against Manuel Santoyo, who had shattered all possibility of happiness for him. Leandro sensed this secret animus, and could not calm his remorse at so great a mishap, for which he felt himself responsible. He sought the friendship of the chemist, hoping his affection would gain Diosdado's forgiveness. With his love the younger of the Santoyos hoped to make up for the harm the older had inflicted.

Don Diosdado returned Leandro's affection. From childhood they were friendly; and of the two Santoyos, he had always felt more kindly towards the younger. He had found him less touchy, milder than Manuel, and his judgment was amply confirmed by the brotherly affection which Leandro had tendered him during the five long months of convalescence following his fall into the Guadalsazar. Later, life had separated them for a time. The Santoyos, who were farmers, had not left the town, while he, the son of a physician, went to Madrid to study. But when, after eleven years, his lameness like a fetter clamped to his foot forced him to return to the yellow orchards of Carrascal del Horcajo, his friendship for his old schoolmate flowered again. In spite of the harsh rusticity in which he lived, Leandro was intelligent, and life presented itself to him as an intellectual and emotional problem, rather than as an economic one. The modesty of his fortune did not trouble him. He preferred books to money, and through them he became aware of the noble supremacy of reason. His reading, while it stirred him to mild rebelliousness, taught him tolerance. Outside of his experience at the mill, which he shared with his brother, Leandro Santoyo knew of little else. But if the exotic literature that he read was not enough to make him learned, it at least awakened in his soul the thirst for knowledge, and exercised upon him a sufficiently mollifying influence to make him understand the fanatical sadness and harshness of his neighbours. Naturally inclined towards the good, anxious for culture, tolerant and devoid of self-righteousness, Leandro soon became unhappy in that remote corner where no one—his brother least of all—thought as he did. That was enough to gain for him Don Diosdado Barral's esteem, who was himself somewhat anarchical in character.

"I foresee," the pharmacist would often tell him, "that sooner or later you will have to break with your brother. Each one of you is after your fashion strong, unmalleable,

upright. You are both roots of a family which is like a tree; some of your innumerable branches will spread out in full bloom, while others will fall shrivelled to the ground. And if we accept proverbial wisdom we cannot expect that your children and Manuel's should ever be too intimate, for like father like son, and they say the offspring of a jackass brays twice a day. Your children will grow up to be disinterested, contemplative artists like yourself; while his, according to the laws of heredity, will be selfish, domineering and grasping; and they will be richer than yours, not only because they are interested in hoarding, but because they were born first; and the old saying is, first come first served. I am asking you to meditate upon this, so that if ever these conjectures of mine come true, they should not surprise you. Cain has not died yet, and as for you, Leandro Santoyo, the blood of Abel courses through your veins."

After a long talk, Leandro and Don Diosdado left the café, and went by Lucas's barber shop, to make sure that Manuel had not returned. Finding that he had not, the miller walked with the pharmacist to his shop, from whence, without any delay, for the clock in the town hall had already struck twelve, he returned home.

Arriving at the mill he saw the children, who for the sake of order ate separately, already at the table. His daughter Irene, with the authority of her thirteen years, directed the dinner. The flock of children consisted of his two sons, Domingo and Justo, and of his brother's children, Modesto, Monica, and Marcos. In the kitchen, sunlit and redolent of onions, garlic and laurel, he found Maria, his oldest daughter, who would be fifteen in August, and whose dark head was already beginning to attract attention. Martin was there too, the oldest of his nephews, who was approaching eighteen and had almost the strength and stature of his father; and Domitila, his sister-in-law, who stood at the wide bell of the hearth turning the spit on which a leg of veal was gradually turning brown. Drop by drop the flesh

exuded its juice, which fell into a pewter dish. At intervals the cook basted the roast with a goodly preparation of lard and lemon juice, to prevent it from drying up altogether.

Leandro took a long drink from the wine skin, and after spitting the last mouthful on the ground and drying his mouth with the back of his hand, he asked:

"Did Manuel return?"

"Some time ago," some one answered. "He is outside fixing a plough trail which broke yesterday."

"And Petra?"

"Are you asking for your wife?" interrupted Domitila, in a gay mood. "I am sure she is not far off but I shan't tell you where. Find out for yourself, lazybones; it's your duty."

In the same teasing spirit, Leandro asked:

"Did you hear mass?"

"What a question! Do you take us for heretics like yourself?"

Just then Petra returned from the yard, where she had been splitting wood, and with the bundle she was carrying in her apron she pushed her husband playfully as she went by him.

"I'm glad to see you," she exclaimed. "I want to know if what they told me is true."

She did not look her thirty years nor show signs of the four births she had gone through. Her eyes and hair were a walnut colour, her mouth was thin, the lines of her figure and breasts were generous, and her walk was lively, picturesque and exciting. Leandro looked at her seriously:

"What did they tell you?"

"Listen, Domitila," the young woman exclaimed, laughing, "he wants to know what we have been told. Isn't he a fool?"

Domitila answered, minding the spit at the same time:

"That he was a little foolish we already knew. But not that much!"

Leandro noticed that his daughter and his nephew were

looking at him, both ready to laugh. His wife approached him, her lips curved pleasantly and her arms akimbo, and when she came near, felt his face with one hand. Having made certain of what she suspected, her face lit up first with wonder and then with laughter.

"It's true!" she shouted; "he has shaved twice!"

Leandro, whose face was sprinkled with little red spots by the double shave, broke away in anger.

"You think that's funny?" he groaned. "I don't. Who brought back the story? Manuel, I suppose?"

"When he told us, he couldn't even talk from laughing."

"He should at least be sorry for what he did," retorted Leandro. "He offended Lucas against all reason; and then challenged him. If I made Lucas shave me again it was to hold his attention while Don Blas took Manuel away. You surprise me with your slow wits."

"But why did you have to interfere?" objected Domitila. "Was it your fight?"

"It was, since one of ours was mixed up in it."

Petra added: "You should have left them alone, rather than make a fool of yourself!"

Leandro looked at the two women in pain, almost in anger, and answered:

"How I pity you. You live under the lash and deserve nothing better. You love force. Your morals are no better than those of the hens. You will always prefer the cock that crows the loudest." And facing his sister-in-law: "You poor stupid thing! . . . If your man were to be killed, what would become of you?"

The dialogue promised to go much farther, since Petra and Domitila maintained that Leandro had humbled himself before Lucas, "as if he were scared," when, shaking the dust from his hands, Manuel Santoyo entered the kitchen.

"Do we eat or not?" he asked. "What's the idea of so much palaver? I'm hungry!"

When he learned what they were talking about, he looked

at his brother askance and smiled with a gesture of contempt that displayed his even, sharp, fierce teeth. Teeth, more than eyes, reflect the soul: what the lips attempt to hide they tell in their immobility; they never lie.

"That fellow is a mollycoddle," he said. And turning towards the women he added: "Our mother must have been expecting a girl when he was born."

II

DON DIOSDADO was right when he maintained that there could be no spiritual bond between Leandro and his brother. They had begun to drift apart from childhood, repelling each other instinctively, and soon each went his own way.

The younger was as reasonable, unselfish and sociable as the older was fanatical, grasping and aloof. The former was soft-hearted, and tried to make the world a vale of peace, the latter, autocratic, turned it into a battleground. They could never come together. Why? The pharmacist himself, whatever leg he might be standing on, had no answer to this question. However, a sufficient answer to account for their differences was to be found in the Law of Heredity.

As a young man, their father, Pedro Santoyo, born in Valladolid, went with other field hands to Carrascal del Horcajo, where men were needed for the rich harvest of that year. Shortly after his arrival he fell in love with the only daughter of Juan Ramirez, for whom he was working, and in whose house he was living. Ramirez owned, besides the mill, four hundred acres of rich land, the best in the district. Fearing that his employer might not accept him as a son-in-law Santoyo seduced the girl and forced her father to consent to the marriage. Three children were born of this union: Manuel, Irene and Leandro, each of whom inherited a different share of the incompatible natures of their parents.

Pedro Santoyo gave his first-born the wildest and most violent part of his own character, that part which was also the most truly his. The boy was indeed so much like his father that he seemed to have been conceived without the mediation of a woman. In Irene, but still more in Leandro, the gentle nature of their mother prevailed. For this reason their father loved them the least, and when opportunity arose would punish them with greater severity.

In his youth Pedro Santoyo had been fair of face, while his hair had been black. Time gradually reversed these traits. As his hair became white his face became darker; the colour of the former seeming to trickle down into his cheeks—a phenomenon quite common among country people. But if age wore him down physically it did not manage to impair his strength of will. Pedro Santoyo, who usually went to bed without undressing, would get up to work at four o'clock in summer and at five in winter. When, upon the death of his father-in-law, the mill came into his hands, his energy increased. Avarice dominated him, and he felt no pity either for his family or for himself. Everyone had to help him in his untiring work. Manuel did it out of a natural tendency; the others helped him through fear, against their wills. Thanks to his toil, in a few years he tripled his fortune. He lived in a miserly fashion and no one, not even Justa his wife, knew what his profits were. Neither did anyone know where he hid them. He was sulky, fierce, impatient and ill-humoured and spoke arrogantly, never brooking discussion or contradiction. He considered a strapping too tender a corrective for his children, and chastized their rare disobediences with a stick. Of the opinion that pain should provoke anger and not tears, their weeping evoked in him ire rather than pity. His little beady eyes had never shed a tear, either of tenderness, pain or hatred, and if ever they became wet it was from the cold. As a child, when thrashed he would gnash his teeth and bite his fists rather than cry. He did not know how. His own father had

been the same way, and when his wife, whom he had loved intensely, died, he had tried to commit suicide by butting his head against a wall; but he could not shed a tear. His grand-uncle, who was executed as a rebel, and his grandfather too had been the same way. It was as if the lachrymal glands had been atrophied for many generations in that family. Logically enough, therefore, Pedro Santoyo deemed tears a sign of effeminacy and cowardice which he could not tolerate even in a woman.

Given the dissimilarity of temperaments, the daily ill treatment which he dealt his children produced different results. The punishment which intimidated Leandro and broke his will, made Manuel more wilful, planting in him new seeds of courage and pride. The children grew up in this manner, in the austerity of misery and toil.

Getting up one morning Pedro Santoyo, already past seventy, suddenly felt his strength ebbing away: his heart beat feebly, and a strange cold numbness paralysed his legs and arms. Realizing that his end was near, he calmly ordered his wife to fetch the priest. After receiving the last sacraments he felt slightly relieved, and expressed the wish to say good-bye to his children, whom the sudden turn of affairs had angered rather than pained, for the old man was dying without a will. It was not the problem of sharing what the old man left that worried them, but their ignorance of the place where he had hid the money.

A scene at once dramatic and grotesque followed. The old man was half sitting in bed, for this was the position which allowed him to breathe with most ease, and his bronze head with its beaked nose and thin lips jutted sharply from the white pillow. His long legs with their bony knees and his arms, opened in a gesture of generosity, gave him the appearance of a Christ descending from the Cross. Justa and Manuel, kneeling at each side of the bed, kissed his hands, which gradually lost their grasping character. Standing pale and silent, with their chins sunk upon their chests, their

brows relaxed in sympathy, Leandro and Irene looked on.

After a long silence Manuel expressed with almost inhuman brutality the thought in the minds of all four of them.

"Father," he said, "it seems that the Lord has seen fit to call you to his side. You should tell us now the place where you keep your money."

These words irritated the dying man; his small half-closed eyes were widened by a sudden flame of hope; he wanted to go on living.

"I have no money," he said between his teeth.

Involuntarily his head turned and his eyes wandered towards a picture of Saint Martin which hung in a corner of the room. Justa and her sons, who were not blinded by the small grief which they were suffering, noticed the gesture. There are persons for whose death we console ourselves long before they die, and Pedro Santoyo was one of these. There was another pause. The miser was resisting in silence, his lips closed obdurately upon his secret. Manuel insisted:

"Father, you are deceiving us. Since you cannot carry the pennies to the other world, you had better let us know where you are hiding them. The money is ours, as much as yours; we all earned it with our work."

Justa added:

"Tell us. Don't be afraid. We will not ask you for a penny if you should get well."

Pedro Santoyo looked first at his wife and then at his son, and again his little eyes turned towards the picture of Saint Martin, who, drawn in the traditional manner, giving half his cloak to a beggar, seemed to invite confession. Santoyo, however, who had not given up his greedy determination to continue living, resisted the incipient impulse to yield his secret.

"Leave me in peace, keep quiet . . . I have no money . . . " he mumbled testily.

With these words, his eyes still turned towards the pious image of Saint Martin as though begging it to remain silent, he passed away. They all gave way to grief except Manuel. While they bent over the dead man and the women broke out into lamentations he, always practical and efficient, entirely the master of himself, rose resolutely and striding quickly toward the picture tore it from the wall. With a knife he separated from the frame the boards which protected it at the back. He hurried as if he wanted to make the search before the soul of the dead man had left the room. He had guessed correctly, for he found between the paper image and the back boards, neatly laid out to save space, eighty thousand reals, in gold coins and bank bills. Unhesitatingly, Manuel quickly pocketed the money with a greedy gesture, not even asking the advice or consent of the others, who looked at him in astonishment. It was to be his alone. This simple gesture of independence gave him a dominion which later no one was to dispute. After the death of Pedro Santoyo he would be the arbiter, the sole master. By tacit consent of all, he would dispose of the future of his brother and sister, and even his mother would obey him. Energetic, grasping, miserly, loving work passionately, Manuel Santoyo was a true scion of his house, a rugged family whose men, all of them sensual, prolific and devout, had never known how to weep.

For a few months after the old man's death the family remained united. But Manuel soon felt that his mother and sister were an obstacle to some of the plans he intended to put into execution without delay. Finding out that Irene, who was approaching twenty, was being courted, he informed the gallant that the girl would bring him twenty thousand reals and some land, and quickly married them. He made Irene take her mother along with her, and since to Leandro's misfortune he had to enter military service that year, Manuel was left in sole possession of the mill. He then made up his mind to marry, not for sentimental reasons but

to surround himself with children who would help him. Santoyo knew that one should make hay while the sun shines, and with that maxim in mind he decided to have children while he was still young, who would later, towards the end of his life, be of service to him.

"A farmer who does not marry can never make money," he said to himself. And he acted accordingly.

Domitila, the wife he chose, was a shrivelled little woman, active and stringy. She could wield a sickle, skin a pig, bake, or stew a chicken in delicious tomato sauce, all with equal success. She had a sickly complexion, sharp oval face, jagged teeth, and bleary eyes; her hair was a glossy black, parted symmetrically over a calm obstinate forehead; a mystic expression, a stoicism redistilled through thousands of resigned and obedient wives during the course of centuries, endowed the meagre, sad and impassive figure of the little woman with a measure of nobility. At dusk when she sat near the hearth after her chores were done, she radiated peacefulness.

Santoyo could have well aspired to a companion of greater beauty and intelligence. He certainly deserved one of superior endowments; but he wittingly chose Domitila, mindful of his peace rather than of his pleasure. What little he had ever learnt after leaving school, he had picked up from popular maxims and proverbs, the quintessence of the wisdom of the people. This wisdom told him that the yard in which the hen crows and the cock keeps silent is in a sad state; and he knew this to be the case where the wife, taking advantage of her beauty, toys with her husband. Hence it was not wise to pick a wife among women whose disturbing attractiveness renders them unmanageable. He also knew that "the devil makes first choice of the prettiest face," a bit of wisdom in accordance with the pious austerity of Spanish tradition, which recommends flight from pretty women, who are the most sought after and most amenable to temptation. The passionate violence and melancholy char-

acter of Spanish love account for the paradox that the most insignificant and ugliest among the women and not the most beautiful, marry with greatest ease. "The pretty one envies the luck of the ugly one," declares an old proverb, based on the repetition of a fact which could only be explained by the half-African nature of those hearts which, before knowing how to love, have already known jealousy. Nor are these men on their guard only against physical grace —they also shun intelligence. Men keep away from the clever woman. "She knows too much," they say, and childishly prefer the foolish to the intelligent one, thinking that her very stupidity will be the best guarantee of her virtue.

Manuel Santoyo was guided by this narrow criterion when he chose his wife. "Women and wine are always in danger of turning," said another proverb he knew well. Therefore he did not choose a pretty wife but a good worker and a humble woman, one whom he could easily bend to his will. He never saw her naked; and from the very day of the wedding he began to treat her in the most despotic fashion. He gave her her first beating a month after they were married. Domitila never protested. She loved her husband—the husband, as she would say, that "God gave her"—and love and obedience put her entirely at his mercy. She did not find this self-effacement painful, since her father, who had often thrashed her, had already accustomed her to a dog's life. She had really done nothing but change masters. Resigned to her fate, her greatest care was that "her master" should not lose his temper on her account. Obedient, quick, silent, always ready to yield, Domitila was no better than a piece of furniture. Yet in this she was wise, for nothing could have endeared her more to the violent companion of her life than the abject renunciation which she assumed.

Santoyo had married in order to live more pleasantly than he could as a single man, and to have many children as the best way to increase his fortune without delay. He

had not done it in order to clamp on the nape of his untamed neck the yoke of matrimony. He continued after marriage to be the sole master of his acts as well as of his money. He admitted no command over himself, nor acquiesced to any order but that which came directly from the impulse of his will. He asked for no help; his destiny was within himself. The gregarious instinct was, to his way of thinking, a sign of weakness.

"The family is to the man what ropes are to the bull: it makes him effeminate, it tames him," he would say. "That is why a man can fight only when he is alone."

His extraordinary muscular vigour, goaded by his ambition and his pride, enabled him to accomplish daily tasks which would have overwhelmed anyone else. He was never heard to complain of the cold, whatever the sting of the frost; nor of the heat, even when the ground gushed fire and sheep fell sun-struck near him. Emaciated, firmly knit, nervous and arid, one might say his body never knew the meaning of fatigue. In his house, at meal time, he seldom sat at the table. He preferred to eat standing, thinking that he would thus steal fewer moments from his work. And like his father, he did not enjoy lying in bed by the side of his wife, but slept fully dressed on the floor, improvising a bed out of covers and pack-saddles carelessly thrown together. Six hours of sleep were all he needed. He never wore a hat, and at all seasons he carried his jacket on his shoulder, to the windward. He boasted of never having worn out the seat of his trousers. With his beaked face and golden eyes, his little head crossed by many scars which bore witness to the number of fights he had engaged in during his warring youth, with his body tempered to steel hardness, his long arms, his sturdy thighs and slim strong waist, Manuel Santoyo, alert and challenging, was the human counterpart of a fighting cock.

A childhood impression was partly responsible for his restlessness. He was about eleven—or perhaps twelve—when his

father took him to a town from whence they were to take a train to Valladolid. The locomotive with its fleet strength, its smoke, and its rumbling noise, rushing down upon the boy, made an indelible impression on him. He thought its size gigantic, and was impressed by its deafening chortle, but still more so by its vigorous heat, and that desire which seemed to animate it to run, to fly, to swoop down on its destination. It seemed so ready to start again that one would think it had stopped against its will, and that, conscious of the value of time, it did not wish to waste a minute. The boy's intelligent attention was also caught by the fact that the train had to leave at ten fifty-nine, and not at eleven, as seemed more natural. From this he cleverly deduced that if the schedule so disposed it, that minute must have its own importance. "If men only knew all you can crowd into a minute well used," the locomotive semed to explain to him, "life would not seem so brief to them." This experience was a lesson rich in suggestions which the youthful Santoyo never forgot.

He grew up obsessed with an impatient desire to squeeze the most out of the fleeting minute. This exacting determination helped to turn his character to stone, and accustomed him to carry his fists tightly clenched, in a gesture at once combative and grasping. But it also made of him a unique worker. There was no ploughman who could thrust the blade deeper into the earth, nor farmhand who could swing on his shoulders a hundred pounds of wheat, and carry it, as he did several times boastfully, bobbing the basket. Nor could anyone scatter the seed as thick and fast as he; nor equal his speed or deftness in reaping. No one ever repeated his feat of reaping over two-thirds of an acre with a plain sickle, shaving the stubble close to the ground.

From morning till night Manuel Santoyo lived intensely and without interruption. Action or consciousness never lagged in him. His mind never wandered off; where his hands were, there too indefatigably, his attention was centred; and in this fixity of purpose was to be found the clue to the

closely woven texture of his character, as well as to his selfishness. More ambitious even than Louis XIV, he thought: "I am the world," and his greatest love was addressed towards himself. He could therefore tolerate no equal.

"Let us not forget," he would say, referring to his birthday, "that the year begins with me. Ahead of me I allow no one."

When, after seven years of military service, Leandro Santoyo returned to the town, Manuel was already the father of three children: Martin the first-born, named from the saint of his birthday—in whom the physical and moral traits of his father and grandfather were already noticeable; Matias, light-haired and tall, like his father; and Marta, in whose black eyes and reddish hair the temperament of her parents seemed to have been evenly fused. Manuel had not allowed any of his children to be named after him, so thorough was his aversion to having anyone resemble him or approach him in any way. But with an eye to the future, he wanted all their names to have the same initial, so that if later their linen or handkerchiefs should have to be marked, it could serve them all equally well. And that initial "M" of their names—a wide octopus-like letter, having a tendency to dominate, to extend itself—was like the brand of a herd.

Shortly after his arrival in Carrascal del Horcajo, Leandro began to suffer from a malady which, imperceptibly, was to separate him from his relatives. The years he had spent in Madrid, the fortunes of war, the many people whom he had met in the far-off cities where he was sent with his regiment, and perhaps as much or even more than his travels, the chance books that fell into his hands, changed his temperament, gradually sensitized him, and broadened his understanding. A greater emotional sensibility carries with it a greater capacity for pain. The careless life of the barracks had given him habits of laziness and adventure,

and made him lose altogether the love of country life. The people and the pastimes which had amused him so much as a youth tired him now; in vain did he look for the warm heartiness which he thought he had left behind him in his native town, but which in reality had been within his own heart. The first impression he received of his brother was most painful. Manuel did not kiss or embrace him, as he expected. When he saw Leandro alight at Siguenza, where he went to meet him with Martin, his eldest son, he shook hands with him, patted him on the back, and smiling lightly exclaimed in solemn though tender tones:

"At last God allows you to return. . . . I am glad. . . . Here's hoping it will be for the good of all. . . ."

Without delay, walking behind the mule upon which the newly arrived brother had placed his luggage, they started off towards the village. Manuel did not keep silence for a minute along the way. He spoke of what he had done, of what he had in mind to do, giving Leandro the impression that nothing outside his work was of interest to him. Leandro noticed this, and the coarse selfishness of it hurt his own natural pride. For had he not also things to talk about? He began to suspect that they would not get along well together. He reflected that Manuel did not know how to listen to others, nor did he linger over memories. The future carried him on, intent upon it alone. He was one of those restless single-track men whose active souls allow them no rest. As for Domitila, unkempt, seedy and colourless, bent too soon by toil, her stockings hanging on spindle legs, her spavined feet planted wide, with a lean face whose thrusting forehead and chin suggested the profile of a new moon —Leandro disliked her too. Of course one look was enough to convince anyone that she possessed the two most important feminine virtues: devotion and untiring diligence. But why did Manuel get himself such a wife? Need our wives be good but not pretty? If in contemplating beauty the spirit finds as much or more pleasure than the senses,

why should we deny ourselves the joy that beauty bestows? . . . Leandro also found his sister Irene, already the mother of a child, quite changed. Her few years of married life must have made her prematurely old, for she had grown fat and did not laugh as she used to. His brother-in-law, Celedonio Rionda; the old schoolteacher, Don Lotario Rodriguez; old man Don Isidro Perez Cadenas; Don Bernardo the locksmith; the barber Lucas—all the other inhabitants of the little town produced a similar impression on him. These people had settled into a monotonous routine. They looked like no one else than their own dreary selves. They were beyond the possibility of renewal. Seemingly alive, they were actually spiritually dead, for they had already lived the meagre measure of their appointed experience.

Manuel Santoyo in his turn did not like the impression he received of his brother. On first sight he found him all too well groomed, too careful of his appearance, his hands too neat and tender for a man of his class. He thought that the traveller, taking advantage of what he had seen and read, was condescending, for Leandro, judging Manuel his intellectual inferior, often refused to discuss matters with him. This aroused Manuel's pride and anger.

The day after Leandro's arrival Manuel asked Domitila:

"We haven't spoken of our brother; what do you think of him?"

Accustomed never to utter her own opinions, she did not answer. Looking at her husband for a moment she lowered her eyes, apparently to indicate that one must seek for the reason of things in the humility of the earth.

"I'll be frank," continued Manuel; "I don't like him. He may be my brother but I don't care for him. I've already figured him out; he's soft, the kind that likes to reap with a long-handled scythe, so as not to have to bend down too much."

He was careful, however, not to let Leandro know his

unfavourable opinion. Every day at dawn the two brothers went to the fields, where Leandro, who was also strong, tried to vie with his brother, if not in ability at least in endurance and effort. The older commanded by right of his superior knowledge; the younger obeyed in silence but with a good will; this co-operation speeded the work. Without making any conscious attempt they came to understand each other again, becoming better acquainted than before the seven years of separation. The subconscious, murmuring kindly in both, brought them together, and gradually the harsh, ugly clodhopper, tragic in his silence but full of early memories, drew his estranged younger brother towards him.

For about a year the two men lived in perfect harmony. Leandro, a good worker, never took a drink nor asked his brother for his share of his father's goods. He seemed to have decided never to marry, and to consider his nephews as his adopted children, apparently never expecting to separate from them. Without a word he accepted the wages his brother assigned to him, a peseta a day, and even this money he did not handle himself, but gave to Domitila for safekeeping, for he never spent money on anything except tobacco.

Manuel Santoyo was afraid that this exemplary conduct would not last long, and his fears were well founded. One evening, his work done, Leandro let his sister-in-law know that he was having supper in town and did not intend to return to the mill to sleep. The following day he did the same. Suddenly his life changed. Almost every evening, often without stopping to wait for supper—he was so impatient—Leandro took the road to town and did not return until daybreak. In a month he was away from the house about twenty times. With this sudden change his character became more cheerful and his expenses increased, for love of money never stood in the way of his pleasure.

One day alone with his sister-in-law, Leandro asked her

what the amount of his savings was—something he had never done before.

"Six hundred reals exactly," she replied, surprised at the question.

Since misers, and she was one in the highest degree, do not expect to be trusted, because they themselves never trust anyone, she added:

"If you wish to, we can figure it out."

"It isn't necessary," Leandro answered. "You aren't going to cheat me. I would like to have the money, though."

"How much do you need?" she asked.

The woman expected that Leandro would ask her for two or three pesetas, as usual. The habit of resignation, of adaptation to everything, of having contented himself with very little, had its effect on Leandro also, and, frightened by his daring, he swallowed hard before answering:

"I want all of it."

She was so surprised at his demand that she dropped her lower jaw, and her black eyes suddenly enlarged, remained fixed on him.

"All of it?"

Her bony hands made an automatic gesture of defence. She was dismayed at having to part with money to which she had grown attached through looking at it every time she opened her trunk. And she added, evasive and curious:

"What is the matter with you, brother? Have you gone crazy, or are you going to marry?"

"Perhaps both."

"Really? Tell me all about it, please; I can't wait to hear it."

"You'll find out in good time. Now, let's stick to the point; I want my money."

Fearful lest her husband object to giving his brother a sum she considered large, Domitila answered:

"The money is there, don't think I've used a penny. But why don't you ask the master for it?"

Leandro's eyes kindled.

"I have no master," he replied loudly, "and I don't need to ask Manuel for what I have earned with my own sweat. He's got nothing to do with this."

Angry, he spat on the floor and began to walk to and fro. He felt humiliated.

"I suggested it," pleaded Domitila, "because . . . well, I thought it would be better!"

"Nobody asked you for your opinion!"

The conversation began to take a bad turn when Manuel Santoyo appeared. He came from the mill, his brows and lashes white with flour, and so stiff that the blanket he had on his shoulders was beginning to slide down the vertical plane of his back. He guessed at once that something disagreeable was up, and asked for an explanation.

"We were speaking of the money your brother gave me for safe-keeping," she answered. "He has asked for it. I guess he needs it."

Addressing his wife, as if his brother were not present, the miller replied dryly:

"How much does he want?"

"All of it, six hundred reals."

"Have you got it on hand?"

"Of course! Where could it be?"

"Then, why don't you give it to him?"

"I didn't want to without your knowing."

"Why? Is it my money? It's his, and he probably knows what he's doing. Quick, then, before I lose my temper."

He spoke with the bitterness of a man whose words are not in accord with his thinking. Paying no attention to Leandro, he turned sharply on his heels and quickly left the room.

At supper Manuel and Domitila commented on the incident. It seemed almost incredible that Leandro, who was

unusually generous and careless of money, should have demanded all of his savings at once.

"Anyone would suspect," the woman suggested, "that he distrusts us."

"Don't be a fool," interrupted Santoyo, "he dosen't distrust us. You're way off the track. I think he's found himself a mistress."

Manuel had guessed correctly. Two months previously Leandro had started a friendship with a girl whose parents very humble farmers, lived in a hamlet named Los Cigarrales, on the shores of the Vaquerizo, about four miles from Carrascal del Horcajo. Her name was Petra; she was about sixteen years of age, and the hard work of the farm, instead of weakening her, had given her a strong, healthy, sensual beauty. Leandro saw her for the first time one morning in the square. He had no sooner noticed the beauty of her eyes and of her wavy black hair, the graceful impudence of her smile, and the wild attractiveness of her body, its strong, agile lines visible under a simple dress, than he went straight towards her, as though magnetized, and with flattering words quickly found his way to her heart. His intentions were honest and he began to woo the girl in order to make her his wife. But once the idyll had begun, he could no more halt his desire than she was able to hold herself in check; and one evening, not altogether conscious of what they were about, both magnificently drunk with poetry, they allowed Love to override the Law.

Their intimacy became known in a short time, and her offended brothers almost attacked the lover. But the latter, with promises which he had every intention of fulfilling, managed to pacify them, and, making use of the authority which an accomplished fact allowed him to assume, he took the girl to Paulina's Inn.

The affair, notwithstanding its triviality and the absolute modesty of Petra, who barely left her room, scandalized a good many people. Evil tongues began to wag, all blaming

Leandro. When he had returned from the army, his fellow townsmen had looked upon him with little enough sympathy. That white lock which cooled the blackness of his carefully brushed hair, that slightly urban accent which they noticed in his speech and those gestures of his displeased them. They said that he affected the appearance of refinement and learning and they avoided his company. On account of this lack of sympathy for him, public opinion disapproved of his relations with Petra. The gossips saw in these relations a trampling underfoot of poor defenceless people by a pretentious outsider, as well as a veiled insult against his neighbours, whose good customs were offended by his shameless conduct. It is also possible that in the bitterness of their disapproval there was envy of the girl's beauty, for nothing is a greater exciter of envy.

When Manuel Santoyo learned of the matter he spoke to Leandro, curious to know what the younger man intended to do. He could not see what the best solution to the affair was. Avaricious and careless of consequences, at once haughty and low, in Santoyo lived two souls, one piratical, the other slavish. He divided people in two great classes: those who could give, as he put it, to whom he would have hired himself as servant for gain; and those who had nothing to give, whom in his pride he scorned. Petra belonged to the latter class, and he had determined therefore that his brother should abandon her.

"What we want is people who will bring something with them, not people who will take from us," he would argue meanly.

When he became convinced that Leandro had no intention of leaving his mistress, his wonder and his indignation were unbounded.

"Do you realize," Manuel would shout, "that the first sandals that hussy ever wore were the ones she bought in order to meet you? Don't you know that she and her brothers have been seen to beg, when they were children?

Even now they haven't enough to pay for their own funeral!"

He would argue impulsively, arrogantly, his lips white with anger, thrusting his open hands towards his brother's throat.

"Why didn't you speak to me before you gave yourself up to that miserable creature? . . . You should have told me, 'Brother I can't live single any longer, I must get married. Whom would you advise me to choose?' . . . and I would have found a woman who suited you."

"Who would have suited us, you should say," interrupted Leandro ironically.

"Well and good, who would have suited both of us. Why not? If we live together, shouldn't we work for our mutual benefit? Do you want a girl? . . . There's Alfonsa, she's the girl for you. You couldn't find a better one. . . . See how quickly I can find you one! Alfonsa Perez, Don Isidro's daughter. She has no brothers and he owns more than two thousand acres of tax-exempt land."

He reflected for a few minutes and in a quiet and somewhat remorseful tone he continued:

"If I hadn't been born so proud; if I hadn't been cut out to be the kind that doesn't want any help, the kind that's self-made, I would now be the husband of Alfonsa myself. What our father—may God keep him in his glory!—did with the daughter of Juan Ramirez, I could have done myself. By hook or crook I could have won her from Don Isidro."

Phlegmatically, Leandro answered:

"I don't like Alfonsa!"

He was going to continue, but Manuel interrupted:

"You fool, who's talking about likes or dislikes? We're speaking of advantage . Isn't Alfonsa rich? Well, that ought to be enough. You know that money makes class, and I have my suspicion that it makes beauty too, so take a hint from me!"

"I don't need to," exclaimed Leandro. "You yourself said that each man is what he is. And I was born that way. We can't understand each other. The first verb you learnt to conjugate in school was the verb *to have*; and I, the verb *to be*. For you, money means everything, but for me, *to be, to live* even if poorly, means everything."

Somewhat aimlessly, because he was not quite sure of what his brother meant, the older replied:

"The poor don't live."

"Whoever thinks he's happy is living well, as long as there is gold in dreams. If I find myself happy with Petra, so happy that I need nothing else, why should I trouble myself to look for another love?"

"There you go again! You must be stupid. Can you fertilize the earth with illusions? You can't? Well then, I prefer dung to dreams. See here, you idiot, don't you realize that the woman who turns your head today will be so ugly in a few years that she'll turn your stomach to look at her? And you will grow old too. And then what? Tell me, then what? No woman, no money, nothing—that's what you'll have. Or else something even worse, for you know that her brothers are a lot of hungry good-for-nothings, and they'll soon be dragging on you."

The discussion, fiercely pursued by both brothers, drew out interminably. To Manuel's economic reasons, his opponent answered with sentimental ones, and this difference in their characters prevented them from coming to any understanding.

At supper time Manuel Santoyo and Domitila could talk of nothing but Leandro, who had been sleeping at Paulina's Inn for three months already. From rumours they knew that Petra was pregnant, and this increased their enmity towards him. Manuel, more miserly with every new son—and the fifth was on its way—would regret bitterly not having married off his brother when he returned to the town. Sooner or later Leandro would wish to make himself a home; nothing more natural at his age. Why then didn't he,

Manuel, who had such foresight and was so careful of his interests, manœuvre affairs in time so that his future sister-in-law would be a help and not a hindrance? Pondering this, Alfonsa's name popped obstinately back into his mind. Of the marriageable girls whom he could recall in twenty leagues around, no one could surpass the only daughter of Perez Cadenas, for she combined a good dowry with a moderate ugliness to temper the desires of the flesh, which was a virtue rather than a defect. Manuel saw a good opportunity in the unmarried state of his handsome and charming brother to do himself a good turn, for he considered as his own whatever money his future sister-in-law might bring to the marriage. With this certainty in mind, his imagination overbrimmed: with that money he would repair the front of the mill, in which its hundred years of existence had bitten a wide crack from the eaves down; he would purchase a pair of ploughs with stationary mould-boards, and a few other farming implements of which he had begun to be in genuine need; he would add nitrogen to his land according to a certain chemical formula that Barral had explained to him, and that was much in use in foreign countries; and would buy a few teams of mules, several olive trees, and some grazing ground which, being by the shores of the Guadalsazar, was indisputably the most fertile in those parts. If only Leandro would be willing to help him! . . . And since of all the passions there is none so blinding and so dangerous to the moral fibre as avarice, he was soon saying to himself that there was no reason why, since a husband's infidelity does not affect his honour, Leandro should not marry Alfonsa and keep Petra on the side if he liked her so well.

Manuel Santoyo and his wife spoke to Leandro about this, trying carefully to lead him to a union which promised to yield such magnificent benefits. But the young man, who was naturally generous and daily more in love with his mistress, disillusioned them. He went further: in a flurry of

quite understandable self-assertion he took courage to ask his brother for an increase in wages. While he was alone, he argued, no one was more careless in this matter than he was; but he had now assumed new obligations; soon he would be a father and need more money. With a peseta a day no one could live: he needed three.

This impudence unleashed Manuel Santoyo's anger, which had never been too well constrained. It was about the middle of September when the discussion broke out and the two brothers were in the field, busy weeding.

"Twelve reals a day!" shouted the older brother, whose surprise and anger was such that the hoe dropped from his hands. "Twelve! I don't earn that myself!"

"I don't know about that," answered Leandro. "But that is no reason why I shouldn't. In any case I don't have to be dependent on you for a wage. This land belongs to both of us. If you give me my share I'll ask for nothing else. Think it over."

Manuel Santoyo unconsciously clenched his fists. He looked more stiff and upright than ever, and that frigid fire of the Castilian sunset, which painters account for by the yellowish colour of the earth, seemed to have rushed into his beady eyes, which flashed aggressively in the reddish circle of his lashless lids. The idea that anyone could even think of taking from him the smallest plot, even the most insignificant corner of a land he considered altogether his own, stirred his exaggerated sense of property. He remained silent for a few minutes, not through a lack of words but because anger seemed to have knotted his tongue and sunk it deep into his throat. At last he managed to speak; but being sly as well as impulsive, he expressed himself with restraint, for he was well aware of the right his brother could assert to back up his demand.

"Are you asking me to divide the land now?" he exclaimed; "are you asking me to divide, so that we can say: 'Up to that cattle lot it is yours, and from that foxthorn

down, let us say, it's mine?' . . . Why man, you don't know what you are asking for! You know the life of the country only on the surface. Only movable goods can be fairly appraised ond shared. There are, let's say, two hundred head of cattle? Well, you say, a hundred for me and a hundred for you. There are eight pair of oxen or mules? I keep four and give you four. There are twenty bushels of wheat or barley in the grange? Half and half, then. That is possible, of course, between honest people, where there is no room for quarrels or disagreement. You can divide clothes, jewels, furniture, movables . . . I'll say that even houses may be appraised and divided, even if they are real property. We'll evaluate the mill at twenty thousand reals—at thirty, you say? Well, we know then that we are to divide its price evenly between the two of us. But land is something different. In our case this land has two values: one, its own, its acreage and quality; the other, what I have given it, which amounts to money I lent it."

Gradually Manuel Santoyo became excited again. His sharp eyes moved restlessly from his brother to the fields, dark, distant and silent, which seemed somehow to be listening eagerly, full of life; and his lips, white and thin, shrunk in an atavistic and murderous expression over his teeth.

"You may say a woman belongs to you all the more because you make use of her," continued Santoyo, the acquisitive instinct lashing him into eloquence. "Domitila, now that she is going to be a mother for the sixth time—counting the two children I have lost—is more my own now than the night we married. Well, the land is like a woman; in both, man plants his seed and makes them fertile and they bring forth through his own strength. The land you see around you is a thousand times more mine than yours . . . do you hear? . . . And if the law says differently, I'll tell the law and all the judges in the world that they lie in their throats. The land our father left us is much more mine than yours, I say again, for in the seven years you lost in the

service of your king I did not lose one day, one evening, in its service."

To add energy to his words he began to stamp his foot on the ground, while he continued:

"This land is to me like my own flesh and blood. I love it more than my own wife, and have taken better care of it too. When I ploughed it, and dunged it, and weeded it, it was like caressing it. Only those who are born farmers can understand that. How I have prayed God while I ploughed, pulling here, pushing there, behind my mules, furrow after furrow! Sometimes because the sun had lashed us without pity for eight or nine months: 'Lord, send me a little water, before I lose my crop!'—I would pray. Or again because it rained too much: 'Lord, take away those clouds!' Or because the frost did not let me plough. Or because there was fog or wind coming on. . . . I swear to you that this land is my own . . . not only in its whole breadth but in its depth too, for I've drenched it with my sweat down to its lowest depths, for years. And if I defend it for myself it's not greed, but because I love it. Bear that in mind. This land is good, it's a noble land . . . whatever you sow in it you get back . . . but even if it were ungrateful, I would still love it. To ask me to part with it is to rip my heart out of my breast."

These moving words impelled Leandro to generosity:

"I do not wish to harm you," he said, "all I want is to be able to live. If you can see a way by which I can meet my needs working as I have done till now, I will not ask for more."

Manuel remained silent, and the argument ended there for that afternoon. Another time they talked of it again, and Manuel, who with the help of Domitila had come to a solution which satisfied somewhat each one of Leandro's alternative propositions, asked him to come and live at the mill. The old house was quite large, and could accommodate both families no matter how many children they should in

time be blessed with. The only obstacle to this project was the irregularity of Leandro's relationship.

"But if you wish to come to live with us," Manuel explained, "you will have to get married."

Leandro looked at him askance. He felt shut out, under an interdict. He was offended and did not answer. Manuel continued:

"You know well enough that I adapt myself to anything; but certain things I cannot accept. I can't allow my wife to sit at the same table with your mistress."

"Why not?"

"Because they're not equals."

Certain of his position, Leandro insisted coldly:

"Why aren't they?"

"Well, well," mumbled Manuel, "don't make me argue that. Each man thinks after his fashion and in order not to grow angry with each other the best thing will be to keep quiet. I would like it very much for us to live together, but only on condition that you marry. Mind you, it's a condition I impose, not a piece of advice."

The memory of Petra, intruding where she was not wanted, a daughter of beggars, a hussy who had shamelessly done him out of a rich sister-in-law whom he needed, began to irritate him anew. His hatred made him add:

"If you want to marry, that's up to you. I don't advise you to."

Taking pleasure in exasperating his brother, Leandro replied:

"Why these scruples? Tell me at once . . . why do you object to my marrying Petra?"

Manuel could no longer contain himself.

"Because she's not worthy of you and doesn't deserve your name. It's mine too, don't you see? Because she's wild, and in the same free way she gave herself to you she'll give herself to some one else, sooner or later."

"And couldn't a wife do the same thing?" insisted Lean-

dro. "Are you going to argue now that legitimate wives never deceive their husbands?"

"Of course they do. Loose married women can always be found aplenty, and they are the devil's pleasure. . . . But in general, I'm sure, they're not as loose as those I just mentioned, for if their love for their husbands won't keep them honest, at least duty will."

"Are you satisfied with that?"

"All I require is that my wife keep my honour clean, whatever the reason."

"Well, I want my wife to respect me for my own sake, on account of the love she bears me, and not for duty's sake. I can't respect faithfulness born out of duty, because she would not be faithful *to me* but to *her duty*, and she would be faithful for the same reason to any man, handsome or homely, intelligent or stupid."

And he added:

"I mean to say that Petra can be as honest and faithful as anyone, and to prove it, and so that we can all live together, I'll go to the church tomorrow to talk with Don Cirilo about the wedding."

At last they had come to some understanding, and Manuel, without enthusiasm, embraced his brother. Thanks to that agreement, Maria, Leandro's first child, was born at the mill two months later.

III

THE mill of the Santoyos had been erected by José Hipolito Ramirez, grandfather of Justa, the girl whom the harvester, Pedro Santoyo, had taken almost by force and had thus made his wife. It was therefore over a hundred years old; and it had been originally built to huddle against one of those small forts which the Arabs, then masters of Carrascal del Horcajo, had raised outside of the citadel to defend with greater ease the banks of the Guadalsazar and the Vaquerizo. Gradually, however, it had spread beyond the old redoubt which had at first sheltered it.

José Hipolito, who died in his nonage, had worked in it without rest for sixty years. His children, Juan and Lucila, helped him, inspired by his own tireless efforts. During the day their father was a farmer, and at night a bricklayer. He laboured especially hard between April and the middle of September, when the moon shone magnificently and, climbing over the rim of the earth, poised in turn above each of the cypresses which lined the uphill road to the cemetery. He built the main walls of his new house, finally to consist of two stories, against the old tower, which not only served as a buttress but also supplied him with abundant building materials. He marked off a yard and, taking advantage of a deep watershed which had once been a moat, he constructed a large pond seven feet in depth, to take care of the needs of the cattle, and of the garden in the dry season.

Finally, to feed the pond, he built an irrigating wheel under a rich flowing spring.

When José Hipolito died, his son Juan continued his work, adding a stable to that which was already built, large enough to shelter cattle and to house some two hundred hens. He also built a dovecot, which he set on the embattled pinnacle of the turret, and in addition he narrowed the channel of the Guadalsazar, to quicken its current and thus increase the speed of the mill wheel.

There in that old house, somewhat decrepit and poorly planned but with sufficient room, the families of Manuel and Leandro came finally to live after the course of years. At first the two families lived so harmoniously that all the children, then but few in number, slept in the same room. But the constantly increasing offspring forced them after a time to separate, each taking a different story. Manuel, moved perhaps by his will to dominate, or perhaps because he followed the old maxim which advised one to be as near the roof as possible, chose the upper one.

This slight break-up came as a relief to all of them for, though on the surface they got along quite well, in truth they never succeeded in forming a genuine union. Obstinate, irrational antipathies, nourished it seemed by obscure inherited differences, definitely separated them. Their temperaments, their attitudes, their way of approaching and judging things, were different. Domitila could never forget that her sister-in-law came into the married state in a surreptitious way, as though smuggled in, and on account of this she occasionally acted toward her sister-in-law with thinly veiled contempt. Her pride led her to think of Petra as fickle in her opinions, careless in the fulfilment of her duties, lazy and weak, and above all—and these were her capital defects—much too pretty and too given to preening herself.

"Even if she were single she shouldn't show such a dislike for the washtub or the kitchen," mumbled Domitila to

herself. "The only things that worry her are her hair and her corset. Have you ever seen anything like it? . . . If we allowed it she would spend the day sewing or making little bonnets for her children, like a young miss. What's important in a married woman is not her figure, but her eagerness for work. Beauty is for sluts who make their living by amusing men. Not that my brother-in-law is worth so much either, but he should have gotten himself a better wife; no shameless hussy who behaves like this one will ever come to a good end."

Domitila, that stringy, sallow-faced little woman, spindle-legged, green and jagged-toothed, of course exaggerated Petra's defects and physical qualities. It was not true that the latter idled away her time, or that she was over-careful of her person. Though Leandro did not object, the very humility of her class and the frequency of childbirth would have prevented it. Not quite dropping to the level of coquetry, still she liked to look comely, to wash her pretty face almost daily at the fountain, and sometimes to set a wildflower in her hair. She was careful not to let her stockings hang wrinkled on her firmly shaped legs. Though she did not pretend to be a royal beauty, she did enjoy the knowledge that her breasts were placed well on her chest, and that she had broad firm hips; and the natural satisfaction which this knowledge produced in her made her cheerful. For this reason she could not get along with her sister-in-law. Petra thought Domitila rude, harsh, knotty and unfriendly, but above all meddlesome and domineering; she seemed to want to get even with her relatives for the absolute submission under which her husband—whom she called "the master"—held her. When Manuel was absent Domitila assumed all his rights for herself. She ordered; while Petra, if she wished to avoid trouble, had to obey; and since Leandro's wife was also a little proud, the enmity which from the very day they met sprang up between the two women became daily darker and deeper.

A similar thing happened between the two brothers. The protecting affection which had as a boy united Manuel to Leandro had grown thinner, to disappear almost entirely during the seven years in which they had lived apart, and when the latter returned, they felt estranged from each other. Later, observing the younger man's small love of work, and seeing him marry a woman so little to his own liking, the indifference that separated them, which really amounted to incompatibility, became positive aversion.

Although Manuel had moved to the second floor of the mill, his will shone omnipotently throughout the whole house, and Leandro, kind and generous himself and above all averse to domestic quarrels, unconsciously accepted it.

Manuel's presence in the home was announced, not by his voice, for he saved words as well as money, but by the blows which he distributed with a heavy hand among his progeny. He punished his children pitilessly as he himself had been punished by his father; and in turn the children, flaming with hatred, fought among themselves. Among his six boys the paternal example spread a long wave of hatred. If Martin was punished, something which seldom happened because the boy attended to his duties more than to his meals, Matias would suffer the consequences. Martin, the strongest, advancing the slightest pretext, would beat Matias, who in his turn would let Marta, who was already eleven years of age, bear the brunt of his spleen. Marta would turn against Modesto, who himself would take it out on Monica. Monica would get even on Marcos, the Benjamin of the lot, who having no one younger on whom to take revenge, would bite his fists. And thus pain and the will to revenge passed from one to the other, like something sacred. Suffering is the only thing that human beings do not filch from one another.

Manuel, not satisfied with beating his own children, also scattered blows and kicks among his nephews. Once he dealt a blow to Irene, feeling that the young woman had

answered pertly to some remark of his. Leandro heard of it from Petra, who with sighs and whines and threats of revenge, told him of the attack, and hatred possessed him in such wise that the two brothers almost came to blows. Manuel maintained his right not to allow disobedience or disrespect in his house; while Leandro, replying thunder for thunder, said that the mill was nothing to him, that his only property was his own wife and children, and that from then on he would not allow any one to punish them. The discussion broke out in the kitchen in the presence of both families. The women kept quiet, fearful lest any word on their part would exasperate the enmity of the men, who argued standing face to face. The children, huddled against the wall, watched excitedly. Irene was crying behind her apron in a corner, and Martin, standing near his father, looked at his uncle with the eyes of a wolf cub.

"If I ever took the trouble to beat your children it was for their own good," Manuel said.

"Well, take care not to do it again. You can beat your own children, but not mine. I'll see to that."

"It is your duty; but when do you do it?"

"In my own good time."

" 'Brother Modesty never became abbot,' says the proverb. You are no good for that."

"Whether I am or not we will see in due time."

"Well, the time has already come; why don't you begin? For a spoilt child the stick is the only remedy, and that applies to sons or nephews. If you can't keep your own in leash, I'll show you how you can be sure of that. No one will take advantage of me."

"Nor me either. Anyone who beats my children beats me. And anyone who tries it will have to pay dearly for it."

Manuel looked at him.

"How much, do you think?"

Upon this provocative retort, Domitila, Petra, and Maria, all yielding to the same impulse, threw themselves

on the men, while Martin, livid and trembling, jumped in front of his father. For the good of all, Leandro did not answer his brother's taunt, and the two men, perhaps simultaneously regretting the incident, turned their backs on each other.

It was obviously neither love nor disinterested desire to improve the children that so frequently made Manuel raise his hand against them. His cruelty was born of his egotism, and he ill-used them to relieve his bad temper, to reaffirm his undisputed authority, and to force them to work harder.

In truth the land was Manuel Santoyo's only love. The land absorbed him, and in order that the rising sun should not look upon it before him, he would go to bed in his clothes. Even after he had hitched the mules there would still be stars towards the west, and, waking up the labourers who slept under the shelter in the yard, he would leave immediately through a back door in the old fort, where a few minutes later, like an ant column, Martin first, followed by Matias, Marta, Modesto, and Marcos, came to meet him.

Meanwhile Domitila, aided by Monica, who was still too young to work in the field, made the fire, opened the hog-sty, looked into the stable where the hens laid, beat up the bed in a peremptory fashion, and while dinner was cooking, devoted herself to washing the clothes which had been soaking over night. Assiduous, diligent, darting tirelessly hither and thither, Manuel's wife seemed made of steel.

Awakened by these goings-on Leandro, Petra, and Maria would get up. To lose no time, he usually left for the field without breakfast. The women remained in the house cleaning, taking care of the dinner, or baking; and shortly, goaded by Irene, who shook and pinched them pitilessly, Domingo and Pedro, blinking with sleepy eyes, got up from their bed—a mattress and a few blankets on the floor—where they usually slept in their clothes. With faces, legs and bare feet dirty, they wandered hungrily from kitchen

to yard in search of crumbs and leavings. They fought, they beat each other up, they waded up to their knees in the mud of the irrigation ditches, and finally, fleeing from Irene, who in answer to her mother's pleas would try to clean and wash them, they escaped towards the river. Frequently no one would see them again until sunset.

In the field, after Manuel, no one showed more perseverance in the work than Leandro. His application was such that it lashed Manuel to even greater effort and was an example to his nephews. He behaved in this wise not out of love for his work, but so that no one would say that he ate anything without sweating hard for it. The land was not his passion, and, inculcated with the civilizing poison of the cities where he had been, he preferred the shop to the field. On the contrary the land induced in Manuel Santoyo, without his knowing it, a pantheistic emotion; sometimes he thought he could feel it palpitate under his feet; he felt it joyous, distended, humid, and above all deep, immensely deep, with foundations millions of miles below the surface. The land made him happy in a mysterious fashion. He imagined it full of sap, and contact with it strengthened his body and expanded his thoughts. He could hear it murmur, and breathed in its exhalations passionately. He pondered its needs, as he saw it dry or reeking moisture or bitten by frost. He seemed to think he could talk to it. Its revelations inspired in him tender interest. The earth would open his grasping heart, and plant in it innumerable dreams. It was his mother. And the happiness he would undergo when he ripped the first furrow for his new harvest could only be compared with that of an author who writes the first line of a book which he expects will be his masterpiece. The plough was for Manuel Santoyo the pen which creates and gives life and colour to things, and the furrow was the line, and the ground to be cut was the white sheet where success and riches are hidden. He had never read a treatise on inorganic chemistry, nor had anyone ever spoken to him about

Ovid, but he felt instinctively the inexhaustible generating power of natural forces, and the eternal protean vigour of the fields, like an immense womb which never tired. The land always answered the tender caresses of the ploughman. To cultivate it, to fertilize it, is to approach an ever expectant woman.

"As for me," he would often say, "I don't want to be buried in one of those mines I have heard of, where men have to walk on all fours. Neither would I want to see myself between the four walls of a factory, for I'd feel like a prisoner about to be asphyxiated. I want to die a farmer. I like to look into the distance, to feel the folds of the wind winding about my body, and to receive over my back whatever the heavens wish to send down, water or fire. Let them put me before one of those dry patches that don't even yield brambles, or let them give me one of those fields where you have to sink the blade of your plough more than a foot into the earth. But don't let them put me in charge of machinery. . . . They are the masters, those machines, and in the eyes of the owner they are worth as much as a man. You can't whip them like a pair of horses. A machine says, 'I don't want to work faster!'—and it doesn't. And the workingman in charge of it becomes its servant, its slave, because the machine has the inventor's mind in it and knows more than the mechanic."

Throughout the year Manuel Santoyo sustained a constant activity. He took the old proverb of the early bird for his motto, and adjusted his whole life to it. He was always kept active and alert, sometimes through his fixed anxiety for gain, at other times through healthy love of the earth, and often again, because of the disquietude which adverse climatic changes produced in him. The result was always the same: he never rested. One could say of his peerless will that it slept with one eye open.

During the months of December and January, after pruning the vines, ploughing the fallow ground and butchering

the swine, he would on rare occasions permit himself the luxury of a cup of coffee at Paulina's café. But as soon as February came the fields absorbed him again. The second ploughing had to be attended to. The creeping grass and other weeds required pulling, but above all the thistles, which would later drain the soil of the water needed by the grain. In March he had to harrow. During April and May, "the keys of the year," the vegetables were planted, the weeding had to be intensified, the tares plucked, the goats milked, and the cheeses made, at which art Domitila had no equal. Early in June Manuel had to begin cutting the grain commonly called "low"—barley, common rye, oats, beans and other grain for the cattle. Towards Saint John's Day potatoes and kidney beans had to be planted. The work of cultivating and harvesting the wheat, the obsession of the farmer, occupied the golden months of July and August. In September the earth had to be dunged, the mills started to grind, and about Michaelmas the grapes were gathered. The sowing of the principal grains had to be done in October, and in November the fallow grounds were reclaimed. And then one had to get ready once more for another year!

These cares kept Santoyo awake at night. The olive lots on the other side of the Vaquerizo river were the ones which gave him most trouble, being of clayish earth, which cracks when it dries and requires greater effort in its cultivation. The grounds destined for the vines also demanded a good deal of work and care, as well as a few fields where he grew Spanish beans, potatoes, lettuce, cauliflower, and all kinds of vegetables. To keep these well watered he had to use three-quarters of the contents of his pond. Only the two hundred acres of rich earth, which he cultivated in the classic Spanish way, "a year on and a year off," responded nobly to his labours.

From the time he bought his seeds from Don Diosdado, his purveyor, to the time that the grain was put into the

mill-hopper, how many anxieties, how many sleepless nights, how much energy it cost him! Sometimes because torrential rains overfilled the channels with water and the fields lay half submerged; sometimes because the winds dried up the moisture at the least opportune moment, or because the low water of the river was not sufficient to move the mill, precisely when the granary overflowed with the contents of the harvest, or because it was necessary to exterminate the ant hills, or to prepare the fertilizer—the truth is that in the mill of the Santoyos, neither the women nor the men ever allowed themselves a moment's rest.

This fever of activity produced in Leandro a subtle ill-being, a vague uneasiness, which was sometimes laziness and sometimes melancholy. He seemed to think that his destiny was not to live there, and that something called him from afar. Why struggle on in this manner? Why become master of new land, acquire new yokes of oxen and more mules; what was the use of increasing the cattle, taking in hired help, as Manuel was doing, without asking advice of anyone, when what was already there was enough for a good living for all of them?

Maria, his first born, was the only one of his children who shared his contemplative character. His other children, Irene in particular, won over by their environment, were more like their cousins; they were all wilful and wild; all of them, in imitation of the others, quarrelled and fought continually, and when Irene gave Domingo a beating, the boy, weaker than she, had to take it out on Justo, his younger brother.

Domitila and Petra fraternized even less; neither had been born, as they often told each other at the top of their voices, to be the other's servant; and the chance of finding themselves both in the last months of pregnancy, helped to make their tempers more sour and to intensify their antagonism. Marta and Maria also began to drift apart. Marta took after her mother; she liked hard work, she could wash

for three or four hours at a stretch and used to make fun of her cousin, who, though older, was weaker than she.

All these antipathies and hatreds weighed heavily on the spirit of Leandro, saddening him, and on Sundays, after lunch, he liked to escape from the mill. He loved walking, and if the weather was good he would wend his way towards the Hill of Fatigue to which a small foot-path gave easy access, and from the top of which he could get a magnificent view of the valley. Frequently, Maria would accompany him. The young girl had a bronze dark face, her mouth was red and small, her green eyes large and sad, and though she was rather tall, the slimness of her adolescent body clearly presaged that she was bound to grow taller yet. Her sweet character, somewhat melancholy, disturbed, it seemed, by a presentiment of something as yet quite distant, harmonized with her appearance, to which her small hands with long tapering fingers gave an aristocratic air.

Climbing up-hill father and daughter discussed the minute details of their lives; but once the top was reached they would sit silent near each other, their faces towards the yellow plain, prey to a deep hieratic emotion evoked by the quietude which enveloped them. Leandro, however, was certain that the girl was not bored; and the peace which surrounded them, as they watched the distant horizon arm in arm, was joy to his heart. Maria's soul was a mirror in which she loved to watch herself.

He who really knows what he wants knows all there is to know. This was the case with Manuel Santoyo whose certain knowledge of his ambitions was the source of his activity. In Leandro, weaker than his brother, the will to struggle did not make itself strongly felt, and he carried within him a question mark, a mysterious "why?" which in the thick of action would damp his will. The objective world deceives and attracts with such force, that men seldom manage to go beyond the circle of their moral ego however great be their desire to analyse themselves. They live in

pitiful ignorance of themselves, and most of them reach old age without ever having so much as once peeped into their inner garden. The infinite finds place within them, and the distance from Sirius to the sun is no greater than the distance which separates each soul from its own conscience. Only in solitude can one accomplish the miracle of self-search, of approaching nearer to one's deep self. Leandro was aware of this. In his house, surrounded by the thirteen members of his family, or in the daily anxiety of work, he could not think, could not "feel himself," as he would phrase it, and his brain hardened and turned barren like the earth of well travelled roads. On the other hand, no sooner did he leave all this far behind than he underwent an intimate resurrection, a germination rich in sap and warmth, in memories and purposes. His personality suddenly became richer, it expanded; one would say that he grew inwards. New boots, which along clamorous streets seem to pass by noiselessly, can be heard whining along the quiet stretches of a road. So it is with thoughts—they only raise their murmuring voices in solitude.

This desire to search within and to live in seclusion—a fond inclination which his daughter shared with him—was what led him to watch the sunset from the Hill of Fatigue.

A hundred yards below him, tirelessly fertile in spite of its seeming aridity, the earth widened in broad, soft undulations, divided into colourful plots and patches, some reddish brown, some yellow ochre—colours and fields which must have been the inspiration for those Castilian shawls which express the thirst and melancholy of stubble-fields. The Guadalsazar and the Vaquerizo, with their peaceful waters polished by the light, wended their way sinuously, like two swords bent and nicked in a thousand places, and at their forking, crowning a large hill, the town could be seen poised on crumbling walls. The little mud houses, all roofed with black tiles, here and there whitewashed, looked like a band of nuns in the light of the setting sun. And be-

yond, outside of the town's district, was the convent of Saint Clara and the row of cypresses which seemed to be marching to the burial grounds. It would be difficult to imagine a picture of simpler composition and more temperate colours. On just two planes, in two colours, all was encompassed; below, the withered grey earth and above the blue sky, and beyond, in the background, the black solid line of the horizon placed there like a hurdle, so that the beckoning illusion of "far and beyond" might leap over it the better.

Tirelessly, with an almost mystic delectation, Leandro Santoyo studied this landscape. It was simple and uniform, yet it had an expressive fascination, like the face of a pale man staring with silent intentness. The plain had something funereal about it and from its infinite expanse the Great Voice seemed to call, the voice one has never heard, embodying the eternal mystery of spaces which human sight will never encompass, the fatality of those tremendous forces which we anticipate and almost hope to encounter, charmed by the haunting desire for annihilation, but which slip past in the end without scathing us. From the earth which seems always the same, yet engenders and absorbs all things, emanated a pain, an anguish born of its immobility. While in the magnificent blue of the sky, the wandering clouds simulated coasts, seas, islands, volcanoes in eruption, or herds of animals at full gallop. The contrast gripped Leandro for, while it reminded him of his fixed state and his penury, loaded with obligations and duties, it stimulated the desire for adventure and the curiosity, which he had acquired from his reading of books and which rankled within him.

"I would go away from all this . . ." he would meditate self-absorbed; "but where to?"

It was already fifteen years since he had returned to Carrascal del Horcajo and he was becoming settled in his habits. How could he break away now? How could he leave behind him the deep loves which ballasted his life? When a

man crawls painfully over the ground for a long time he finds it as difficult as a barnyard fowl to open his wings and soar. And Leandro soon admitted to himself that it was already impossible for him to leave the ground. From his observatory he would peer for a long time at the courses of the Vaquerizo and the Guadalsazar, and at the roads which like white scars crossed the yellow plain and bore away his nomadic thoughts.

In Castile the landscape tells a man in the morning, "Get up!" and at night, "It is time for sleep."— Its speech goes no further, because on the plain there are no echoes nor half-tones; no shelter, no whispers. And because the Castilian landscape is so utterly bare the desires of its inhabitants are all the more passionate and their dreams are those of no other men. The greatest warriors and the most exalted mystics were cradled there. Its repose invites ripe reflection and slow speech, and in its monotony without great heights or deep depressions or distractions of any kind, ideas take hold much better and sink deep roots into the mind. Burning like a desert in the summer months, exceedingly cold in winter, hard, untamable, and cruel to its children, Castile is a valley of sorrow.

Musing in this way, Leandro Santoyo looked, deeply moved, at the swallows, which in the last few days of August began to fly south; he thought enviously of the girls—also migrating birds—who left town in search of service in the capital; and of the nuns who left for other corners of the world from time to time; and of the youths forced by military service to leave the land; and of the audacious adventurers, who expatriated themselves in obedience to a mysterious atavism.

These considerations hurt him one afternoon more deeply than ever. He looked first towards the mill, near which the mill-pond reflected the light like a mirror, and then at the cemetery, which seemed in the coming twilight like a black bird poised on the gold of the plain, and these two objects

represented to him a synthesis of his whole life. There—he thought of his house—I belong now; and later, when I die, they will lay me there. Who could have told me that my last and first beds would be found so near each other? Fear of having wasted his life made him tremble; he looked around him in anguish. His drama was that of the earth which lives without movement; and in answer to his fearful question the landscape seemed to reply. Like a creditor who is not in a hurry to collect because he is certain his note will not be protested, the cemetery cried: "Go away!"—and the roads, which are like scars of the lashings with which civilization awakens the country and teaches its men to walk, echoed the order "Go!"

Leandro Santoyo turned to his daughter:

"Would you leave this place?"

The bright green eyes of the girl looked at him without emotion or curiosity.

"Where to?"

Leandro answered in a disinterested tone, as if speaking of something unrealizable:

"Somewhere far away, I don't know. Just travel and see new lands."

"Whom could I go with?"

"Whom? Why me, of course!"

Maria's face beamed with a new light; an unaccustomed pallor mixed with the bronze of her cheeks, and her eyes flamed. For a second her lips, always serious, attempted a smile.

"We cannot think of it," she said. "In her condition mother could not stand it. We are too many, and soon there will be another. You alone could not drag so many after you. Besides . . . where could we live better than here? Now, with all of us working, for better or for worse, we are pulling ahead, and all we beg of God is that it should never be worse. . . ."

While her pretty mouth uttered these resigned and pru-

dent words which sounded so old on the youthful carmine of her lips, the beautiful eyes, the colour of the sea they had never gazed upon, recovered their taciturnity.

"What we need," she added, "is that you enjoy good health; that we girls should find good men to marry, and that the children"—she meant her brothers—"grow up hard-working men, so they can repay what you did for them." She crossed her hands on her lap, looked far away, and her face assumed a pious expression. Leandro could not object to what she had said. How could he answer? In her words was condensed all that was to happen, and should come to be. What Pedro Santoyo had accomplished, exactly that would be accomplished by his sons first, and later by his grandsons. For the present and the future the road would always be the same: To be born, to work, to give birth to children and to die. When he gave them life, his grandfather had imparted their whole history to his descendants.

On Sundays when the bad weather prevented him from going out with his daughter, Leandro Santoyo would go to town alone. Although unsheltered and boring, Paulina's Inn, or Lucas's barber shop, or even the very porticoes about the square, seemed to him to be preferable to the mill, where there was always at least one child whining.

Carrascal del Horcajo was one of those sordid, desolate, self-enclosed hamlets which Zuloaga's keen inspiration has chosen to transpose to his canvases without a human figure, the better to convey their desolation. On Sunday particularly, because it was a day of mass and of rest, silence acquired a greater depth. The jail-like houses of Carrascal, with their doors half closed, their blinds drawn over small black windows like empty eye sockets, and their wide eaves casting shadows on their fronts, shared the melancholy of the ruined castle. Among these shabby houses with their clay walls and enormous balconies upheld by worm-eaten posts, the streets twined, empty and dark.

A few acacias withered away in an uncobbled corner of

the square. Under their shade, the owner of the only grocery store in the place, Antonio "El Migao"—"crumbled-up" Antonio, as he had been nicknamed—installed a melon stand from the middle of September to the end of October, around which a few youths gathered. Further down there was a dried-up drinking place for animals, and a well, from which the farmers, on their return from the fields towards dusk, drew water for their cattle. For many silent hours time glided by without noise or gesture. The people whom boredom brought together under the doorways, in front of Lucas's barber shop, or Paulina's Inn, looked timelessly at the sky without a word, for they had already told each other many a time all they knew. From a sort of psychic mimicry, derived from their long life together, they all looked alike and their postures and utterances were all the same. In their long periods of silence these people analysed themselves, searching within, seeking something to take hold of. Finding nothing at all, they would look out through the windows of their eyes, like some one who, tired of being withindoors, comes out onto the balcony. But that was useless exertion. Outside themselves there was nothing unusual, and in their brains ideas slowly died. . . . They had all known each other by heart for too long a time. Like Doña Gerarda, untiring sentinel of the deserted little square of Saint Martin, everything about was familiar to them.

In the corner of the square, following his pigs, the swineherd Jesus would appear with his dirty beard caught up into woolly little knots, his hand-sickle under his arm, his shirt dirty, his ragged trousers tied at the waist with a piece of cord, and that drunkenness—he had had only one—which day in and day out for thirty long years he had exhibited in the streets. All those who saw him would say in unison: "There goes Jesus."

A girl would return from the fountain, with a water jar on her shoulder, or held against her hip, and all would announce to themselves, simultaneously:

"Tom's daughter."

A string of donkeys would arrive, and the watchers would say to themselves:

"Dick's donkeys."

A pair of oxen would pass and as they followed them with their eyes they would all think:

"Harry's oxen."

Uncle Jenaro would go by, always with his boar, which he hired out as stud, for which service he asked three pesetas, and the watchers would meditate:

"Jenaro. . . ."

No sooner said than their thoughts went back to sleep within their dull heads. Sometimes some one had the great good fortune of being able to tell the group something sensational:

"Do you know who is giving up the ghost?"

"Who?"

"An aunt of Lolita, the pianist's. Don Blas saw her and he says if she can last until night it will be a miracle."

This would shake the boredom of those present, for in small towns a funeral is the only source of amusement for thousands, who have nothing else to wait for except death. For this reason the fact was commented upon, turned over and over, gnawed at in every possible way. After which they all returned to their mute states, happy at having heard something new.

Carrascal del Horcajo had never felt that hankering for the unknown which reduces the distance between cities in a mysterious way; makes Paris dream of Tokio and Tokio of Paris; nor had it ever felt the will for selection with which nature, like an artist dissatisfied with himself, renews and improves itself unceasingly.

Situated in the western extremity of Europe, Spain is the land of the setting sun in relation to the old world, and this daily sidereal agony seems to drench it with sadness. Like all the towns of Castile, Carrascal del Horcajo slept a lethargic

sleep of centuries. The fatalistic conviction in which all of its inhabitants shared, that God kept watch over them and that in the end He would mete out justice to them, flattered their quietism. Resignation found a greater number of converts than action. Do the stars or the seasons or the rivers, with their eternal flow, ever hurry? . . . The houses, almost entirely windowless, seemed to recommend their dwellers to cultivate the inward life; and the kitchens, at the wide hearth of which the whole family came together to eat and to utter their daily devotions as under the wings of a great hen, also advised contempt of the streets. The rooms, always chilly like convent cells, where Love, inhibited by mystic shames, never lights a flame, were austere, and the devout pictures of saints—Our Lady of Sorrows with the seven symbolic daggers sunk in Her heart, or Jesus Christ tied to a column, or the Hill of Calvery with its three crosses standing against a tempestuous sky, or Hell with its damned souls consumed by eternal fire—all these stood out from the white bareness of the walls with tragic emphasis. These influences operated insensibly on the minds of the children: they were the first thing they saw upon awakening, and the last thing that impressed their sleep-laden eyes at night. Livid images, tortured, stained with blood, greeted them in the morning and said good-night to them in the evening. And before the painful fate of Him who, on account of His exceeding goodness died on the cross, little by little their souls became filled with pain. Will anyone ever realize the whole ominous trail of melancholy, of cruelty, that the art of Zurbaran and Ribera blazed into the soul of the Spaniard? The obstinacy of this fierce sadness which filled the homes, and brimming over flowed into the streets, was keenly felt by Leandro Santoyo as soon as he entered the town. It hovered over the dry complexions of the women, who wore their hair like the Virgin, and had an expression of bitterness about their mouths. It could be seen in the oval of their enamel-like faces, too, from whence shone

burning black eyes with such faith in Hell as if they had seen it; in the primitive hatred evinced by the boys fighting among themselves; and in the tight reserve of the men, impulsive and fierce behind their phlegmatic masks. In the habit of listening to the talk of his books—as he put it—the younger of the millers could not accustom himself to the dissimulation and slyness of his fellow townsmen, who listened to him in silence, apparently ignorant of what he said, and as soon as he finished, began to gossip to show him that they knew more than he.

When the subsoil is too rich, vegetation is either altogether lacking or is sparse and stunted, as occurs in great mining regions; the same thing happens with individuals of rich inward life, who as a rule express themselves sparely in a very few words. To this unmistakable trait in the psychology of the Castilian farmer another factor contributes —silence which, like the terrible poison curari, atrophies the motor nerves but leaves the sensory nerves intact.

Leandro Santoyo was oppressed by these men, who in spite of their mutual esteem treated each other distantly, as if they thought that indifference was a virtue; and who were cautious not to disclose their motives, resembling in this the windowless fronts of their dwellings. A husband would never kiss his wife in public or smile at her; nor would parents kiss their children before others, for this tenderness was considered a sign of weakness. What happens within each soul must be known by no one save God; which explains the important rôle the confessional has always played in Spain. The proverb, "Let the house burn, as long as it does not smoke," is a moral portrait of this race of Iberians who are friendly only towards silence and pain and in whom the ideals of the early Romans have left their mark.

"An open fist," Manuel Santoyo would say to excuse his violence, "protects either badly or not at all. Only when clenched to strike can it defend."

But his brother, who on returning from work would play with his children, and at night would go to sleep holding Petra's hand as if the bed were a road on which they walked together, could not understand that.

One afternoon Leandro Santoyo went to Paulina's Inn, ordered coffee, and sitting at the table, noticed that it was dirty. Afraid of staining himself he called the innkeeper:

"Say, 'Repetia,' will you please clean this?"

The woman—not yet over forty, with black hair, robust, and not altogether ugly—came quickly. Her arms were bare, and in her diligent hands she brought a water bottle and a towel.

"Look at that dirt," Leandro insisted. "Clean it off, will you. . . ."

Paulina replied: "It's coffee."

"It doesn't matter; clean it off."

Paulina poured a little water over the stain, and began to rub. With the effort the table shook in time with the shaking of her pendent, well developed breasts. Slowly, the stain became paler, but did not quite disappear. The edges in particular remained almost as before. Not wishing to be blamed for stupidity, the woman said:

"The trouble is that we put sugar in the coffee, and sugar sticks very hard to marble."

These simple words cut Leandro to the quick. Paulina was right. Sugar sticks to marble in spite of its hardness. If love grips the heart, it is on account of its sweetness. There is no glue faster than honey; what honey cannot fasten together nothing will. . . . Is it possible that no one has ever thought of that? . . .

IV

THE wide hall which Paulina's initiative had turned into a café, dimmed by the dismantled portico of the square, looked like a dark cavernous granary. The low arch of the door, over three yards wide, added to this appearance. The cobbled floor, the high roofing, and the smoky stone walls, increased the darkness.

Almost the whole back wall of the room was occupied by an enormous hearth, and under its bell about twenty persons could sit comfortably. The sides of these ample hearths bristle with nails, on which hang sausages, hams and sides of bacon, and on which in winter the laundry is hung to dry. They express the forthright democratic spirit of Castile. Just as the cloak—a genuinely Spanish garment—distributes the warmth evenly throughout the body, so the classic Castilian kitchen spreads its warmth equally to all those who seek shelter in it. Both account for the plain habits and communistic bent of the Spanish people, whose aristocracy, without harm to its own pride or traditional rights, enjoys mingling with the lower classes and imitating them. In winter especially, the life of the home concentrates itself under the bell of the hearth. People, cats, dogs, all gather there. On both sides of the brick quadrangle which is used for the fireplace, are set two long wide benches of pine or beech. These are hollow and are used for the storage of food. From a crane fastened to the smoky walls hangs a wide-bellied earthen pot, where the family's meals cook

slowly. At measured intervals a girl throws an armful of dead leaves and small twigs or a bundle of broom into the fire. The rapidity with which these burn fills the room with warmth and cheerful light, and casts a reddish glow on the surrounding faces. The men, sitting on the benches or in chairs with seats of hide or hemp, which they place in a row as they arrive, converse in measured tones; the boys keep silent, fascinated by the flames; the dogs sleep with their muzzles to the floor; and at the warmest spot, near the ash heap, lies a cat, elegantly curled into a ball, its closed eyes showing as oblique slits. From time to time a woman rises, uncovers the earthen pot, sips its contents, throws something into it, and covers it again. Devoured by the flames the wood crackles and twists, the pot sings its sleepy song, and in convulsive draughts, the wind, moaning timorously, rushes through the chimney. Then meal time arrives. The simple substantial food, reeking with onions, laurel, and rosemary, is served in coarse earthenware, on little tables without tablecloths—stunted, dwarfish tables, about a foot high, akin to those used by the Moors. The fire, lit in the morning, burns until night. Under the shelter of the hearth the hours go by sweetly. Near its warmth one eats, prays, and talks over the few happenings of the working day. Only the hearth can struggle successfully against the wind of the plain. The fireplace is not only the heart and the belly, but the altar as well.

The frequenters of Paulina's café were made up of two groups, according to their manner of dress and their social rank—the middle class and the plebeian. The latter, especially during December and January, gathered in the kitchen, and at times their jokes or quarrels filled the wide café. Those who arrived first occupied the benches and the chairs; the others remained standing, facing the fire. In shirt-sleeves, topped by broad-brimmed hats with conical crowns, their bodies stood out sharply against the glare of the hearth. Most of the members of this group drank out

of a wine skin, and some of them ate bread and sausage or ham. In their rustic hands, tanned and cracked by the sun, the polished knives looked razor-sharp and menacing in the light.

Towards the front of the hall, barely lit by a few kerosene lamps, stood four tables not too firmly set on their wooden legs. Around these, between nine and eleven at night, gathered the eight or ten most important persons of the little town to play dominoes—the chemist, Don Diosdado Barral; the doctor, Don Blas Hernandez Halcon; the schoolmaster, Don Lotario Rodriguez; the district political boss, Don Isidro Perez Cadenas; the secretary to the Council, Don José Diaz, whom the pharmacist had nicknamed "Don Profundo"; Leandro Santoyo; his brother-in-law, Celedonio Rionda; Paco Camacho; Don Cirilo the priest and one or two more.

Buzzing about diligently, talkative, quick, and careful of the humour of her customers, which she knew well, Paulina waited on everybody solicitously and took no more care of the distinguished gathering than of the drivers, overseers, shepherds, olive-gatherers and carriers, whose wine skins she kept well filled.

Whether on account of her simple mind, or because she had the idea that in that way she flattered her customers, Paulina seemed to marvel at whatever was told her, and as she listened she exclaimed frequently: "You don't say!" . . . "Do you really think so?" . . . "How terrible!" . . . "Don't tell me!" . . . and other phrases with which she punctuated the thread of her interlocutor's narrative. Because she repeated these phrases so often, Don Diosdado, happy coiner of nicknames, called her "La Repetia," which she discreetly accepted without protest.

Paulina had won fame as a witch, and people would come to consult her from hamlets twenty miles away. The story went that shortly after she became a widow she covered her body with soot, and that she was well versed therefore in osmancy or the art of reading the future from the bones of

animals, and in oneiromancy, the ancient science which deciphers the portent of dreams. Also that she was an adept in the science of anthroposcopy, which inquires into the future of people by reading their faces; and in hydromancy too, as she once proved by telling the chemist about certain secrets of his own life which he had never confided to anyone. After that Don Diosdado had for her a feeling of sympathy not altogether devoid of fear. There was no sickness—and this was the despair of the doctor—for which "La Repetia" did not have some remedy. She taught the women of Carrascal del Horcajo to burn the hairs which they lost in the morning in combing their heads, to prevent the evil-eye; she cured constipation by tying a dirty stocking around the patient's neck. She advised against wearing high heels, which reduced the chance of motherhood, and against washing the face, because, according to her, dirt protects the skin against the sun. She knew the magic virtues of certain weeds and pebbles which she gathered at night by the light of the moon. She was also a midwife and had saved the life of old Lucas's niece in a difficult childbirth, by applying certain fumes and hanging her by her legs from the fireplace in order to turn the fœtus to its correct position. Several people also maintained that her power to bring together or separate people was extraordinary, and that no one could resist the benign or adverse witchery of her suggestions. Upon her advice, all the children of the town were taken to certain pious women the day after their birth to suckle from them first, that they might be endowed with a mild temper.

On account of her thaumaturgical powers "La Repetia" was highly esteemed. She had been a widow for twenty years, her husband having been killed by highwaymen on the road to Siguenza. Paulina had since then avoided the place of the crime, and to go to Siguenza where the needs of her calling as midwife often took her, she would take a roundabout way several miles longer. Her delicacy in this matter bore witness to her undying grief for her deceased

husband. Her unimpeachable honesty, and the care she devoted to her half-crippled mother and her sister, also a widow with three children, imbued her with dignity. She was loved and respected, and with the help and good will of the townsfolk her inn slowly improved and her gains increased.

One year, about Saint Eulogio's day, when many strangers came into town, she expressed a desire to increase the number of beds at her inn and Don Diosdado lent her the money without asking for interest. And when she wanted to expand her business, to turn a wide hall and part of a stable into a café, everybody offered their services. One fixed the roof; some one else, who knew about bricklaying, built a wall or tore one down; somebody else, like Don Bernardo the smith, did all the carpentry work in his leisure hours. It would appear that each one wanted to leave a sign of his good will in that place, destined at different times to house them all, and Paulina, diplomatic, discreet and generous with hearty words, took more or less advantage of the situation.

She even made use of Basilio the sexton, who was also the grave-digger. In a corner of the cemetery, under a bush, lay four tombstones belonging to graves which had been emptied in default of their rent. Paulina was thinking of buying a few tables when she thought that these four slabs, placed with their inscriptions face down, and properly polished and scraped, could be made good use of. She spoke secretly to Basilio about this, offering to buy them and stating her willingness to pay about fifteen pesetas for the lot. The sexton at first refused the offer, feeling that nothing could give him the right to dispose of what did not belong to him. Paulina insisted eloquently, urging that, not only the fact that they had been abandoned by their owners, but also the fact that they were found in the graveyard, which was under his custody, gave him the right to consider them his rightful property. Besides, who would reclaim the stones of graves which had been abandoned and the bones of

which had been thrown long ago into the charnel house?

The frail honesty of the sexton began to yield to her argument, and finally, after much chaffering, they closed their deal. Paulina promised to give him five dollars, instead of the three she had originally offered, and Basilio undertook to give her the stones cleaned, polished, and renewed as if they had just come from a dealer.

The whole town attended the opening of the new café, for which Paulina had secured the two flutes and drum of the municipal Council for entertainment. Between six and eight there was a dance; Paulina served her customers a large wine skin gratis; and in the evening Don Diosdado Barral used up a whole box of rockets. The objects of greatest attention and praise were the clean, brand-new, perfectly white tables. The innkeeper claimed to have bought them in Siguenza; and against those slabs of marble, forgotten for many years in the silence of the graveyard, and precisely on the side which had been closest to the mouldering corpses, the coffee cups, the little brandy glasses, the dominoes clinked joyfully. The stones which had been used once as the doors of Death were now reclaimed for the use of Life.

By chance Barral discovered the secret.

One evening Don Diosdado, who could draw a little and used to amuse himself making caricatures, on putting his hand under the table to sharpen the point of the pencil against the side of the slab which he thought rougher, noticed grooves which immediately made him curious. The pharmacist, with his perplexed face turned upwards, remained bending over the table, concentrating his attention on what he was feeling with his finger tips. His friends asked him what was the matter but he did not answer. He was certain that what he could feel were letters and not useless frills, and his curiosity augmented.

"There is a large 'R' under here, or I don't know how to read," he exclaimed.

Those around him observed him astonished. No one answered. Extending his arm slightly, the explorer did not take much time to make certain that the next relief that his fingers were tracing was an "I." In the same line, a little further, he recognized a large "P."

"What is this?" he shouted, getting up brusquely. "I can't be mistaken. I have just felt the three initials of *requiescat in pace*—we are drinking our coffee over a tomb!"

All those present rose to their feet disturbed by a superstitious uneasiness. What did it mean? To find out, two of the strongest men turned the stone and according to the epitaph engraved on it, it was discovered to have been the tombstone of a certain Don Damian Rodriguez Carriles, presbyter, deceased forty-two years previously. The marbles on the other three tables also showed necrological inscriptions.

This macabre discovery impressed the town deeply. Don Bernardo, then the new mayor, signed the dismissal of Basilio, and Paulina saw her customers entirely disappear. People were wary of the café, fearing evil within it; and many would peep in, to see from the outside the wide dark place, where at dusk the four slabs, placed symmetrically, induced an uncanny feeling. Not knowing what to do to make up for her mistake, Paulina determined to give them away; but the pharmacist dissuaded her from this idea.

"The repulsive origin of these stones," he told her, "added to your fame as a witch, has driven your customers away. Everybody who comes to the pharmacy talks about you, and I am sure the neighbourhood is afraid of you. But don't worry. I shall soon give a banquet here for about ten people. I'll invite Don Blas, our friend Perez Cadenas—you know he would go into hell for a free meal—Don Lotario, whose chronic hunger, I am sure, is stronger than his superstition, Paco, my brother-in-law, Don Cirilo, and a few others. As for the cost, you will have to take care of that, since the affair is for your benefit."

"La Repetia" acquiesced to everything, and the banquet took place one Sunday towards dusk. Of the four wretched tables Paulina made one which she covered with a tablecloth, and twelve persons sat about it. The idea of celebrating a banquet in what Don Diosdado called Paulina's "Parthenon," was received in the town with enthusiasm. The meal was well prepared, wine ran freely, and when the time for coffee and brandy arrived, "Don Profundo"—who had been given the presiding seat—improvised a speech in which, as was to be expected, the skeleton that had been the cause of this epicurean gathering was soon brought out. Don Diosdado, standing on his optimistic leg, proposed a toast to the memory of "Presbyter Don Damian Rodriguez Carriles" and to the other three deceased whose tombstones were being used as tables for the feast, after which, following the Greek tradition, he poured a cup of wine over the tablecloth as a libation of joy.

The pharmacist had made no mistake about the moral consequences of that supper, on which the town afterwards commented favourably. The ill-will towards the café disappeared, and gradually it recovered its former cheerfulness.

One of its most faithful clients was the miser, Don Isidro Perez Cadenas, who took possession of his table at eight o'clock daily—for he had his supper early—and left punctually at nine.

Don Isidro lived near the Church of Saint Martin, on whose monumental gothic door had been carved a group representing the war-like and merciful saint on horseback, about to give half his cloak to a beggar. Though he had been forced to look at it since his childhood, the pious example had not softened his hard heart—according to his reputation with the townsfolk. He lived by usury and not from the prosperous land holdings which he had inherited. For this reason his victims, held in the spider web of his compound interest, were called the "enchained ones"—an allusion to the second name of the usurer, which means chain.

Had he been less parsimonious, he could have gone to Madrid to try his hand at politics, but the passion for saving dominated him. He lived like a poor man with his wife and his daughter Alfonsa, his only child, and a maidservant, the daughter of Don Lotario the teacher, who, lacking funds, had allowed him to take her into service to wait on table.

Don Isidro was approaching seventy. He was tall and slightly bent into that characteristic stoop with which old people seem to peer into the earth where soon they will rest. He was meticulous, orderly and very precise in his movements. A sagging double chin lengthened his face. He liked to rise early, and every morning he heard mass on his knees. With his head bent devoutly, his thin body in close-fitting black garments, rigorously cut, his figure looked like a "Z" upon the white flagstones. Mass over, he would leave church, at the door of which a few beggars awaited him.

Before the stretched hands of the beggars—one of them bitten by leprosy—the miser would stop and slowly, that his good action should not go by unnoticed of God, he would put his fingers into his vest pocket, which his foresight always kept well filled with pennies for alms. The beggars already knew how small his alms were and would shout in chorus:

"Not from that pocket, Don Isidro, from the other!"

But he paid no attention, did not even answer them. With six or seven coppers he took care of them all.

His hand was the only thing Perez Cadenas ever gave generously. But it never responded to the warmth with which a friend might greet him, but hung cold and limp. One would think that he renounced its ownership, and gave it away. This trait inspired the chemist to the biting phrase:

"He gives it in that way because he knows no one wants it."

After supper he would go for a walk along the porticoes of the square, and though he knew by heart the articles on display at the hardware shop—always the same—he never

went by without stopping to look at them. From there he went directly to the café.

"Don Profundo," who was a citizen of staid habits, never arrived before Perez Cadenas, nor long afterwards. No sooner had he crossed the threshold than he would start removing his woollen mittens, which covered his hands from the beginning of October to the end of April. He was a poor man who could barely make ends meet. He earned fifteen dollars a month from the Council, and with this and the few pesetas he was able to pick up, by adjusting tax assessments and collecting accounts for other municipalities, he managed to eke out an existence. "Don Profundo" and Don Isidro, both being taciturn and exceedingly temperate in character, understood each other very well; and the little charcoal burner that Paulina would set under their table on winter nights knitted their friendship into closer harmony.

The secretary of the Council was distinguished by the austere aspect of his face and by his silence, which was really caused by his deafness. Together they gave him a certain distinction. The town had observed that "Don Profundo" would yield the right side to anyone walking with him in the street, whatever their social status; and people recognized in this action a nice trait of unostentatious good breeding. Even Barral interpreted it in this manner. Later on it was found out that "Don Profundo" was rather hard of hearing in his left ear, and that his amiable urbanity derived from it and not from his good manners.

Tall and ungainly, with long loose arms hanging from his shoulders as if hung out to dry, Don José Ramon enjoyed among his simple neighbours an awe-inspiring prestige. The two dozen books he kept in his house, that many people in the town had seen with their own eyes; the diplomatic scrupulousness with which he clung to his own opinions; his slow, manly, sonorous voice, and even the sebaceous cyst which he had behind his left ear—gave him a majestic presence.

Certain traits of his—such as having his wife use the curling tongs on the small lock which half shadowed his forehead, or that of washing his face in the morning with the very same water which the evening before he had put in the foot-warmer he took with him to bed, or even the very disagreeable one of rolling each spoonful of soup around in his mouth before swallowing it—might have made him seem ridiculous, but did not quite manage to discredit him. His contemplative aspect and his silence masked his mental emptiness and kept him above the crowd. People respected him and believed in him. When "Don Profundo" would say: "I have taken off my woollen undershirt today," his listeners believed that warmer weather was to be expected shortly.

The only persons over whom Don José Ramon did not exercise this ascendancy were Don Diosdado, who mocked him without pity, and Don Blas Hernandez Halcon, whose contempt for "Don Profundo" often expressed itself disrespectfully.

Don Blas was approaching forty-five years of age. He had a short neck, dark complexion, and wide shoulders. His face was sanguine, and his hair was black and cut short; his small, round, mouse-like eyes shone brilliantly. He was loquacious and aggressive, and under his burgomaster's belly his spindle legs ended in large high-arched feet which were slightly pigeon-toed. As he walked they seemed to be looking at each other. His figure harmonized to the dot with his somewhat pugnacious and anarchical character. Nothing quite satisfied him. His lips, ambushed behind his moustaches, were always muttering protests. When he arrived at Carrascal del Horcajo he was newly wed and seemed quite jolly; but the poverty of the town, the vulgarity of his environment, and the incessant toil he had had to go through for fifteen years, to provide for his six children—of whom the two oldest were employed in Madrid, the elder in a tailor shop and the younger in a pharmacy—embittered his nature.

Don Blas personified restlessness. When the café was inaugurated, he joined the coterie of Don Isidro, until the hypocritical and sordid spirit of the miser, and still more the opaque presence of "Don Profundo," drove him away. He then joined the table of licentiate Barral, whose sly wit and good-humoured talk were a relief. The two men had a mutual sympathy for each other and soon a friendship welded them together that nothing could ever dissolve. However, Don Blas was dissatisfied. His fervid missionary character was in dissonance with the ironic and eclectic spirit of the pharmacist. While Don Diosdado thought there was nothing wrong with the world, to the physician nothing seemed right, and this disparity of opinion sometimes irritated Hernandez Halcon to desperation.

"That cripple," he would say, "is too frivolous. If we all imitated him society would crumble. We ought not to lose interest in affairs. Those who laugh are as dangerous to progress as those who fold their arms. To fill our hearts with laughter is to lose them."

One evening, in an attempt at independence, he sat apart by himself. And thus it came about that besides the frankly plebeian gathering in the back, the café of Paulina contained three other groups—a demonstration of the regrettable distance which individualism places between men.

Every evening the pettifogging lawyer, Celedonio Rionda, sat at the table of Don Isidro and "Don Profundo." The miser trusted him with all his business—a distinction which turned him into a galley-master or hangman of the "enchained ones." Don Cirilo, the priest, always poorly shaved and with an everlasting toothpick behind his ear, also sat with them, as did the corporal of the Civil Guard. Licentiate Barral's companions were usually Leandro Santoyo, Don Lotario the teacher, and Don Bernardo the locksmith, to whom Don Diosdado said one evening, in the heat of an anti-clerical dispute, that he would not lack work so long as there were students for the priesthood. Paco Camacho,

brother-in-law of the chemist, and Graciano Garcia, proprietor of the hardware store, who usually kept company with Hernandez Halcon, agreed fervently with the liberal ideas of the doctor. Some people, called "the Intermittents" by Barral, would come to Paulina's Parthenon now and again. Manuel Santoyo was among these. He would always appear, even during a snow-storm, with his jacket on his shoulder, and after a few words of greeting, without losing his sourness, would go to the back to talk with "his own kind," as he proudly called the workingmen.

Notwithstanding this classification, there really did not exist any precise differences among these groups. The shades which separated them were very slight, and the customers moved frequently from their own table to another. The environment was responsible for the sameness of their minds. Don Diosdado would in vain scatter about him the good salt of his irony and Hernandez Halcon protest against everything—witticisms and protests all faded away in the unending marasmus of an environment which "Don Profundo," silent, pretentious and empty, symbolized with perfect exactness. Carrascal del Horcajo was a microscopic soundboard where by chance and only once in a very long while a few of the questions which moved the curiosity of the country at large would resound. The scandalous crime committed in Madrid, for instance, was the object of tireless commentaries in the café, and its frequenters threw themselves upon a humorous anecdote which a travelling salesman dropped in passing, tasted it with the delectation worthy of an exquisite spiritual dish, and fed on it like a spider on a fly. For months the witty story, ruminated and tediously commented upon by all of them, passed from mouth to mouth until it altogether lost its wit. The surrounding vulgarity made it heavy and soggy until it became ordinary trash, and over it slowly fell the heaviest of earth, that of oblivion.

Hernandez Halcon especially liked the solicitous company

of Barral's brother-in-law. It was said that he and his sister, Clara Luz, were a little mad, and his sickly gauntness, the vagueness of his gaze, and the incoherences and vagaries of his conversation justified this assertion. He stuttered slightly, and his words matched his mental sluggishness. Marriage had not tempted him. He was always anxious to be of service to everybody. In his leisure moments he stuffed birds and did lacquer work. His genine enthusiasm, however, was along other lines. Paco Camacho thought himself a discoverer, a pioneer, and he liked to fix his humble, blue eyes on what no one, as he thought, had previously noticed. When somebody would ask in a serious manner the better to mock him: "After all is said and done, Don Paco, what are you, what do you dedicate yourself to?"—he would answer, swelling with pleasure, and lowering his eyes: "Well, to tell the truth, I'm an inventor."

With these vague words he pretended to justify his life. Truth to tell, the discoveries with which Paco Camacho had enriched his neighbours were only two. One consisted of three concentric rings fastened by a screw and nut, which he called a "dish tipper." This was meant to incline the soup plate and to do away with the need of holding it up by the brim. And the other was what he called "reflector matches," intended for lighting places in which the person using them would remain for only a short time. The only novelty in these match sticks, which were a little longer and thicker than the usual ones, consisted in a little lead ball that their inventor attached to the lower end to make them remain in a vertical position when allowed to stand by themselves.

"Let us imagine that you need to go to the pantry at night to fetch something," Paco Camacho would say, "and that you do not happen to have a candle handy. Do you understand? . . . Well, if you want to have your hands free, an ordinary match stick will burn or at least char the place you fit it into, and besides will give only a poor light.

Do you begin to get my idea? While my 'reflector match' once lit, can even be thrown up in the air, with the certainty that it will fall right end up."

This plain, silent man, absorbed by his ingenuous imagination, was Don Blas's best listener. They were the complement of each other. For if the physician—with his straight rush of conversation without parenthesis—needed some one to address, Paco Camacho, deaf and contemplative, liked to have some one who would talk to him.

Gamed-legged Barral also had a devout and loyal listener, whom he frequently made the butt of his wit. This was the teacher Don Lotario Rodriguez. Ill-kempt, violent and foul-mouthed, Don Lotario, a genuinely Spanish mixture of educator and mule-driver, perpetuated the cruel tradition of the ancient schoolmasters. He had been widowed twice, and had nine children, three boys and six girls. Sebastiana and Eulogia worked as chambermaids in a hotel in Valladolid. Beatriz and Placida he had managed to place almost on charity, for the former was serving at Perez Cadenas's, and the other in the priest's home, for their board only. He himself lived with the rest of his progeny on the six hundred reals a year which he received from the municipality and which he had to collect himself from the townsfolk, and on the ten centimos each pupil paid him every Saturday.

With such ridiculously small emolument and with whatever he managed to cultivate in a little garden plot of his own, the wretched man dragged out his life. Having a single-track mind and being stubborn, irascible, reactionary, and an Apostolic-Roman-Catholic to the hilt, Don Lotario brought with him into the school his privations and hatreds, the miserable environment which spread gloom over his home. Of his children only the boys, who were youngest, learned to read or write; the girls he did not even teach to tell the time.

"Women," he would say, "don't need such things."

When he punished his offspring, either male or female, he went far beyond the limits of ferocity.

The school of Carrascal del Horcajo was situated next door to the Church of Saint Martin. It consisted of a large hall, with bare earth for floor, and two little windows near the roof beams, which opened on the dirt and disagreeable odours of a littered yard.

The furnishings consisted of several rows of pine desks and benches, and a cabinet. The dusty shelves of the cabinet were filled with moth-eaten stuffed birds—hawks, swallows, linnets, red owls and barn owls, orioles, crested larks, magpies, quails, and others—mounted on little cardboard boxes and generously donated by Paco Comacho as his contribution to the ornithological education of his neighbours.

The damp, dark, and stuffy room—redolent of all the herds of dirty children who had attended it—was for Don Lotario a hall of torture as well as a centre of culture.

The proverb, "As the wind disperses the chaff, so does punishment vice," or "The rod straightens crooked habits," or "A hiding is the best teacher"—and others no less frightful—constituted the principal elements in Don Lotario's pedagogical system. To punish his pupils he used diverse procedures, of which the mildest was that of making them stand with their faces to the wall during the time of the lesson, or forcing them to kneel down on a handful of dried chick-peas scattered on the floor. Most of the time, however, these punishments were too gentle and left him dissatisfied. Rushing at the small delinquent with sadistic delight he would flog him with a thick strap or would make him undergo the torture of the ferule; or getting hold of both his ears, would lift him off the ground. In a way the school represented for Don Lotario an athletic field, a gymnasium or arena; and the unhappy boys had observed that it was in winter particularly that the terrible master gave them the worst hidings, in order to warm up and loosen his stiff joints. When the class was ended, the boys on whom the daily lesson left more traces in the flesh than in the under-

standing, would leave, and Don Lotario would stay behind to unfasten the glass panes from the windows. He did this to prevent the students from breaking them with stones, as they had often done, prompted to evil by an instinctive impulse for revenge. The schoolroom therefore remained open to the four winds overnight. The following morning those who were condemned to sit in it would find it grey, humid, inhospitable, and cold as a dungeon.

The members of the group over which Perez Cadenas and "Don Profundo" presided would habitually indulge in chocolate. This drink, because it does not steam even when boiling, faithfully symbolizes the spirit of Castile. The distinguishing trait of the group was gravity, the absence of gestures and smiles, and a certain manner they had of looking at each other as if listening to what the other had to say, even when everyone was silent. In order not to waste even their words, Don Isidro would accept benevolently whatever was said, moving his small bald head in affirmation.

Don Cirilo would narrate hunting incidents and anecdotes. Celedonio Rionda, who possessed considerable land, was preoccupied by the weather, and "Don Profundo," who lived under the happy certainty that Spain was the best country in the world, and Carrascal del Horcajo the richest, most beautiful, and most progressive spot in it, would never tire of praising the character of its inhabitants, its historical glories, its climate, its land fructified by its two rivers, and above all the incomparable kindness of its waters. The "Springs of Health" on the outskirts of the town, opened during the reign of Isabella II—"and whose flow" he would say, extending his arm, "is this thick"—were the object of his enthusiasm.

"You go there," he would exclaim, "with a glass, a lemon, and a little sugar and you can prepare yourself a refreshment such as you cannot get anywhere in Madrid."

The chemist would mock Don Isidro, the secretary of the

Council, and their table-fellows without mercy. He called the table at which they gathered, "the table of the cypresses" on account of the dark, elongated figures of Perez Cadenas and "Don Profundo"; and as no one could ignore that it had been a tombstone, and as in addition Don Cirilo sat there, everybody in the café approved of the name. With the aid of Leandro, whose loyal devotion had won him over, he would also make fun of Don Lotario, whom he considered a barbarian, and of Doña Lina, the mayor's wife, whom he called the "Flower Pot," on account of her habit of spending her days at the window; a name which soon became popular.

Don Diosdado thought everything was humorous. He would laugh at the badly towsled head of the priest, which he called "the dirty stubble-field of Don Cirilo," and at his ugly habit of putting his toothpick behind his ear after a meal, making as much show of it as "Don Profundo" did of his sebaceous cyst. He would also laugh heartily at the secretary of the Council, who, listening silently, would continually groan "uuhm, uuhm . . ." as if in pain, or in the throes of a powerful mental effort; a trait which gave his prolonged silences a certain solemnity. He mockingly named Manuel Santoyo the spiritual kinsman of Don Lotario—because with strap in hand, with or without cause, he forced his children to take a physic twice a month.

"Your brother does that," Don Diosdado would end up by saying, "to save fertilizer. You know the fear of a beating helps the action of the medicine?"

The ever-smiling face of the chemist made a queer contrast to the perplexed face of Hernandez Halcon. His face as broad as it was long, thick-necked, sharp witted, and fond of a discussion, Don Blas carried a tumult in his heart.

"It is necessary," he would say, "to winnow people as one does wheat, to separate the grain from the chaff. I am the wind blowing over men, facilitating the operation. Believe me, in this town there is too much straw."

No sooner did he sit down at his table than he would be-

gin to thunder against slothful public servants who try to remedy the hardships of the people instead of preventing them—in this way imitating those parents, who, without foresight, will not dress their children until their clothes are torn or grow too short for them. He declaimed against military service, which deprives the soil of its tillers, wastes its best hands in foolish exercises, and converts the wholesome and fruitful concept of patriotism into an empty word. Still more fiercely would he tilt against clerical fanaticism, which petrifies the mainsprings of the soul and loads it with shackles.

Speaking of this, the little, round and flaming jet-black eyes of the doctor would look unconciously towards "the table of the cypresses," at which Don Cirilo and the corporal of the Civil Guard slowly and gravely drank their chocolate.

"Formerly the Church and now the School," Don Blas would shout before the acquiescing faces of Graciano Garcia and of Camacho, "were the two highest windows through which the spirit glimpsed the ideal. Science has already taken from the Church its beneficent virtue; the school therefore remains alone. But what regeneration can we expect of them in Spain? None. Our teachers are even worse than our public servants, and in proof of what I maintain you can look at Don Lotario. That old hack, advancing reasons of propriety, did not even teach his daughters to read. The other supreme source of public health is the bedroom. Yes sir, the bedroom; the sacred refuge where generation and birth take place. But we are the unhappy offshoots of a race without vision that cuts down its forests and allows its rivers to dry up. What do we know of hygiene? Having many breasts, swine, foxes and wolves can reproduce themselves in numbers. A woman however has only two, which indicates that she should only have two children. But try to tell them these things!. . . They will call you immoral and drive you from the house with a stick. Here, each home

is a brats' nest. People live for their stomachs; that is why we call earning the daily bread 'making a living' without considering that the true life, the life of the soul, comes precisely after eating. And of course—once the individual is full he remembers the species. So we procreate without thought for the future, without discernment, in unhealthy surroundings, and we beget without considering the tremendous responsibility which attends the act. And if the child dies, without blinking an eye, we sigh resignedly, 'A little angel for heaven!' 'It was God's will,' we say. . . . God is such a comfortable invention! . . . He is the mattress on which unscrupulous consciences go to sleep."

With fervour and goat-like agility, the atrabilious, somewhat incoherent inspiration of Don Blas jumped from one theme to another; immigration and the sadness of the national character being his favourite ones.

"We bled ourselves in America even worse than in the sterile war in Morocco, and to our misfortune it is the ambitious, the combative, the hard-fisted men of the nation who leave us. . . . The two representative types of the Spanish psychology have been separated: Don Quixote attempted a new expedition and crossed the seas; Sancho—symbol of those who like myself and my listeners were born with failure already within them—remains behind, and now the 'Knight of the Sorrowful Face' does not communicate with his squire, nor would the squire understand him even if he did. We have lost our enthusiasm—the source of all joy, all courage and of the greatest virtues. Our soul migrated and left the body behind, worn out, heavy, indolent and sad. Sancho is lazy, gross, foul-mouthed and pious. We curse constantly and because we are fanatical and lascivious men, who swear by what we most venerate—we have converted the names of the sexual organs into imprecations in current use. From that fanaticism and that lethargy springs our melancholy. . . ."

When Hernandez Halcon started off there was no end,

and Paco Camacho, Graciano Garcia, and sometimes Leandro Santoyo, would listen to him and admire him with open mouths.

Under the incisive words of the doctor, the frequenters of the café acquired sharply defined contours. The race bears the same relation to the individual as the magic lantern to the shapes it casts upon the screen. These are the mannikins that constitute the particular, the transitory, the petty souls, in which the gigantic spirit of society manifests itself in part. As a result of this in the drama of universal progress the true protagonists are never individual men but rather the different races. In the pitiful gathering of Paulina's café, Perez Cadenas typified political bossism and usury; Don José Ramon, honoured vacuity; Don Lotario, the atavistic cruelty of a people who do not permit their children to laugh and consider the privilege of teaching a painful obligation. Don Diosdado was the sceptic, the egotistic railer, indifferent to the common good; Hernandez Halcon the futile reformer. All these figures were no more than shadows, "ephemeral projections." What was truly certain and lasting was to be found in their environment. Its influence prevailed and endured. Carrascal del Horcajo, the work of three different civilizations, with its little mud houses adhering to the vestiges of an old castle, its haphazard crooked streets, its ghoulish silence, its sleepy spirit, its melancholy of centuries, its rivers almost dry, its fields without trees, impoverished and thirsty, and its inhospitable climate, was in itself the important thing, what was most genuine and sturdy in that truly Castilian corner of the land.

From nine to ten the majority of the habitués of the café would begin to leave. Those who sat at "the table of the cypresses" would be the first to rise, and it was Don Isidro who, with a few words and two or three unvarying gestures, initiated the exodus. Suddenly he would mumble in his old soft voice:

"Well, well, it seems to me it is already time . . ."

He would always say the same thing and rise, tall and lean, with his little bald head set above his prominent shoulder blades. He would carefully brush the lapels of his coat, pick up his cloak from the chair on which he had placed it carefully folded when he had arrived, and when he put it on, he would never fail to exclaim:

"The weight of its folds has made my cloak lose its shape; every day I find it longer in front and shorter at the back."

"You are slowly losing your own shape," the priest would observe. "The years are beginning to tell on you. . . ."

"Perhaps you are right," Don Isidro would answer.

And after looking around him, making certain that he had not forgotten anything, he would say good-night, and with mincing steps would start for the door. Shortly afterwards, Don José Ramon, the other "cypress," and the corporal of the Civil Guard would leave also. And then Rionda and Don Cirilo would challenge each other to a game of dominoes.

Almost simultaneously the other groups would disperse. Paco Camacho, who suffered from a serious nervous weakness, when he felt sleepy; and Leandro Santoyo, Don Bernardo and the schoolmaster, because they had to get up early.

Don Diosdado and Hernandez Halcon, who as students had acquired the habit of retiring late, never left before eleven. Until that time, without moving from their own tables, the chemist and the doctor talked, and their conversation, serious on the part of the one and epigrammatic and paradoxical on the part of the other, spread a rainbow of good humour over the stuffy and ill-lit café.

One evening Barral in a festive mood was lamenting the stupidity and meagreness of the scene in which their bad luck brought them to live.

"Are our neighbours really small," he was asking, "or do they seem so to us because they move in too heroic a frame? . . . I don't know, but I feel imbecility surrounds

me. The plain humbles its inhabitants, and reflects on them its own uniform colour and monotony; those "preclair Castilian Knights" of whom we are so proud, participate in the clear and uninteresting transparency of the plains. In Carrascal no one stands out, we all imitate each other, we are all one. . . ."

The improvisation had reached this point when Manuel Santoyo, who was about to leave for the mill, crossed the hall. Holding himself stiff and straight, without a hat and with his jacket on his shoulder, the miller stopped a moment.

"Are you complaining that we are all equal?" he asked.

"Not of that exactly, no," explained the chemist; "but that we are all too much alike. Take note that in the tailor shop of life, seemingly so well stocked, there are really only half a dozen original styles. We put these on with pleasure, believing them quite handsome, when in reality they are worn out and threadbare."

Barral stopped, looked at Santoyo, thinking perhaps that he had not been understood.

"We are too much alike. . . ."

"Not altogether," interrupted Manuel.

"You don't think so? Of course we are! I tell you we all look like twin brothers here."

Perturbed by the owlish grain-coloured eyes of his interlocutor, Don Diosdado sought the approval of the doctor with his eyes. The latter, true to his aggressive nature, came to his aid.

"You are right," he said; "around here no one is different. In this town every man is his neighbour's mirror."

Certain of himself, if not of his learning, the miller addressed himself to the doctor, holding his attention with eyes that probed deep into his consciousness.

"You speak that way . . . because you have not looked at me carefully enough."

"I have often looked at you!"

"You must have looked in a hurry. . . ."

Don Blas, whose blood boiled instantly at the contradiction, was about to reply when the pharmacist prevented him:

"I should like," he said, "to see Carrascal del Horcajo distinguish itself on account of something definite . . . because we produced a great scientist . . . or a great murderer. . . . I should love it if in my town there were to be found a very brutal and ferocious man—the cruellest man in Spain. . . . A very strong, very courageous, or a very despicable man . . . the most unspeakably despicable man in the whole world. Do you understand now?"

"Of course I do."

"Or if there were a real animal soul, a true one, capable of doing away at one sitting with a whole sheep. Or of turning a half dozen virgins into mothers all in the same day. But no, I repeat we are all alike, we are born tame and nobody protests or stands out above the rest. The herd continues. We are a lot of geldings. A sheep gelder would find nothing to do here."

The chemist was silent, and Manuel Santoyo, as though reminding him of the origin of his lameness, observed him with a hostile glance and a domineering expression of disdain. Through his thin lips he showed his small white teeth, close-set and sharp.

"You say that," he exclaimed insolently, "because you forget that I am living here."

Barral, somehow humiliated, sought in vain for an answer. The miller, like a strutting rooster about to crow, raised his head, and with springy step—all nerves and muscle—left the café.

His departure was followed by a long silence. Manuel Santoyo was fitting material for the drama they desired.

V

SKIPPING on their bare, dirty feet, five noisy guttersnipes, full of life, broke into the quietude of the Inn, deserted and dark at this early hour. The two oldest were soon tugging at each other, quarrelling peevishly over the possession of a little bag which they all guarded, holding it by the corners with aggressive vigilance. In the bag a small pile of little fish, still alive, twisted convulsively.

"I am going to do the talking!" contended one of the wranglers.

And the other one answered:

"I should say not! You know nothing about bargaining or about anything else!"

"And the money!" added a third, "we shall divide that!"

Still somewhat sleepy and in a grouchy humour, Paulina approached them and scolded them for their noise:

"I'll strangle the first one who makes a sound. You shameless creatures, don't you know there is a sick person here? What are you looking for?"

"We've come from the river," they all answered in unison. "See if you want what we brought."

They exhibited the silvery and squirming catch on the table. It weighed about four pounds.

"All that noise about this trash?" asked the innkeeper. "Great catch you made! . . . I don't want it, you can throw it away."

"How much will you give us for it?"

"Half a real."

The boys looked at one another downcast.

"Give us a real," they begged, "and then we can share five centimos apiece."

"La Repetia" took four coins from the pocket of her apron.

"Here," she said, "and get out of here quick; I have no time to lose today. Another day I'll pay you better."

She had barely closed the door on the boys when Manuel Santoyo came in.

"You in town at this time of day!" exclaimed Paulina scrutinizing him in surprise. "Is there anything wrong at your house?"

"Not at all, I thank heaven."

"I'm glad of that. If you wait a minute I'll have coffee ready, I can't offer you anything else."

"Thank you. The stars were still out when I got up and had breakfast. Believe it or not, but I've already cut more than one-tenth of an acre all by myself."

As he said this, in the pride of accomplished effort, his lean, fibrous, wiry person puffed up with vanity. He had come, as usual, with his jacket slung over his shoulder, his shirt open, and the corduroy trousers tied up with two strings at the calves; a practice which favours the circulation of the blood about the knee, as modern sportsmen have learnt from the inhabitants of the plains.

"La Repetia" offered to bring the miller a small cup of rum.

"You like to waste words," Santoyo answered. "You know I never drink."

"Aren't you going to sit down either?"

"No thanks, chairs weren't made for me."

He took a turn or two about the room, with a slow, elastic step, and twice his little golden eyes looked at the cuckoo clock which ticked in the kitchen.

"Do you think," he asked, "that Don Isidro is back from church yet?"

"I think so. If you need to see him now you will find him home."

"I went to church to say an Our Father and he wasn't there."

"Probably he had left already."

"It would be better to wait until eight, I think."

"That's up to you."

She began to sweep and after a few minutes she asked:

"If you are looking for Perez Cadenas to talk business with him you have chosen a bad day, for he must be very angry on account of his cloak. Have you heard what happened?"

"I have, something."

"The old man is not in the right at all. But he's such a mean, greedy fellow, not able to make the slightest sacrifice. . . . This is what happened. Last night Paquita, my niece, who is about nine now, stumbled while she was playing with the cat, and fell full length in the fire. My heavens! the scream I gave must have been heard through the whole town. The little girl got up crazy with fear and pain, her hair and skirt burning, and began to run wildly about. The flames spread more and more, and were beginning to cover her entirely. You could hardly see her face. She looked like a torch. The people about, meanwhile, were too scared to move. They all just stood stupidly with their mouths open. I don't remember who poured a pail of water on her. But it was no use. Really, I believe it was worse. Don Diosdado then—may God give him a hundred years more to live!—got up shouting, 'a blanket, a blanket, bring me a blanket!' . . . The child, as if to be cooler in the street, ran towards the door. As I say, nobody, Don Blas, Don Cirilo, 'Don Profundo,' Paco Camacho, Don Lotario the teacher, nor Don Bernardo, not one of them did a thing. At that moment Don Disodado, jumping on his lame leg, made for

Don Isidro who was getting ready to leave, tore the cloak from his shoulders and wrapped the little girl up in it. It saved her life."

"And Don Isidro, what did he do?" asked the miller.

"You should have seen how he acted when he saw his old rag, which he kept so carefully, all black and scorched. I would never have thought him capable, at his age, of losing his temper so. He was furious. At first Barral tried to laugh it off. 'Be patient,' he argued, 'your neighbour Saint Martin lost more when he gave half his cloak away.' Tired of hearing him grumble, he became serious and told him what he thought in plain terms. 'Do you believe, Don Tight-Wad, that a piece of old cloth is worth more than a life? And besides, a cloak that for over half a century already has been good for nothing but to cover so despicable a carcass as yours, deserves to be burned. If you feel cold buy an overcoat; you have plenty of money. And if you don't want to buy one, rid us of your presence by dying as soon as possible!' I don't need to tell you that Don Isidro has been very harshly criticized, and that the old man is furious against the whole town. That's why I told you before, that if you were going to see him, you come at a very bad time."

"La Repetia" was curious about the purpose of Santoyo's visit to Perez Cadenas at such an early hour, and since Manuel suspected this, he kept his secret just to mortify her. After a few more minutes of conversation he left the Inn.

"The profits of the business I'm going to propose to him," said Manuel Santoyo to himself, "will ease his bad temper quick enough."

His mind harked back to a sore subject.

"If that fool of a brother," he sighed, "had married Alfonsa, as I so often advised him to, I would not be forced to take this step now."

Manuel Santoyo arrived at the little bowl-shaped square shaded by four dingy acacia trees, which opened in front of

the Church of Saint Martin. Behind the panes of her balcony window he noticed the black eyes of Doña Gerarda, the wife of Don Isidro, riveted on him. Santoyo greeted her with a wave of his hand, and to a certain inquiring gesture which he made, she answered with another, signifying that he could come up if he wanted to.

In the dining-room where Don Isidro had just finished breakfast, the miller found Celedonio Rionda, his brother-in-law. His presence disconcerted Manuel, for he was averse to having his business known by anyone prematurely. Although they showed each other deference, the two men were not fond of each other. Celedonio was piqued because Manuel, who was already coming into wealth, had never invited him to share in his business deals, and he even went so far as to say that his brother-in-law had tricked him, and that when he married Irene, Manuel had withheld his sister's full share of her father's property. This was true.

With a slow, gentle gesture—the gesture of an old man—Perez Cadenas invited his visitor to take a seat. His well-known stinginess never permitted him to give anybody anything costing more.

"Thanks very much, Don Isidro," replied Santoyo, "but I feel more at ease standing, and I believe I can think and talk better so."

"But you will never grow fat taking such bad care of yourself."

"All the better; the leaner one dies the less one has to give back to the earth, don't you think?"

"As you will, then; make yourself entirely at home."

In that dark room, uncarpeted and furnished in the most summary fashion with a sideboard, a few straight chairs and cane-back arm-chairs, the dark, gentle, mournful figure of Perez Cadenas cut a priestly profile against the blankness of the carefully whitewashed wall. In the recess of the window a linnet slept in a wooden cage.

Don Isidro remained at the table, ready to listen to what

his visitor had to say, and his relaxed long right hand rested in a frozen attitude on the white tablecloth.

From the rocking-chair where he rested heavily, Celedonio Rionda asked his brother-in-law:

"Do you come from the mill?"

"No, I was mowing this morning."

"I should have known that," Rionda acknowledged.

Quickly, the miller answered:

"If you say that on account of my trousers, let me tell you that the same thing happens with corduroy as with bottles of old wine, the more dust they have on them the better they look; and if you are referring to my shirt, let me tell you that I just put it on this morning, and that in the hands of my Domitila the laundry comes out as white as snow."

Carelessly dressed, badly shaved and somewhat sleepy, Rionda did not answer, but there was contempt and hatred in his silence. Manuel Santoyo looked at him for a few seconds with fixed gaze, happy to have humiliated him, and then continued, addressing himself to Don Isidro:

"You have known me for a good many years, and you know that slowly, through my love of work and my honesty, I am beginning to make out a little better. You can say I am poor and I'll agree. But lazy, never, and even less a trickster."

He broke off to let the pause give greater solemnity to his words. Perez Cadenas looked at him affectionately, as he tenderly passed his hand over his lean under-chin, hanging limp like a rag, and bade him go on. "The face of a saint and the claws of a cat," thought Santoyo, remembering the old saw, and he continued:

"I always govern myself by proverbs and there is one I like very much which says, 'Eat what food you have, and when you haven't any lick your paws.' I always lived according to it, never going the breadth of a line beyond my strength. But the load I am carrying gets heavier every day,

and I have to do something not to fall under it. There are more hands in my house than necessary. I have had eleven children, of whom seven are living, counting the girl my wife gave birth to the second of this month; her name is Macaria . . ."

With a courteous gesture of congratulation, Don Isidro nodded his little yellow head, and the miller continued:

"My sister-in-law has just gotten through a birth too; it seems that Leandro and I are fighting it out to see which can have a larger family. So that with his children and mine, and the four of us adults, sixteen people sit at our table."

"Sixteen!" repeated Don Isidro, surprised.

"Yes sir, sixteen. And the mill has to provide bread for all. When the boys were younger," Manuel continued, "the work yielded better profits. But they are already becoming grown men, and naturally I would not want them to remain workingmen like myself all their lives."

"What better trade can you give them than to teach them to cultivate a land which belongs to them?" interrupted Don Isidro with his honeyed voice. "You know the adage, 'Whether good or bad, the year is always profitable to the miller and truck-gardener.' "

Manuel Santoyo shrugged his shoulders, ironical and vexed at the same time.

"I need not be taught to love the earth," he said; "love of it was born in me. But you know much better than I that for us poor farmers and small tillers who have to sell our wheat on the threshing floor for what little we are offered if we are to pay our taxes, the fields are very far from being a free gift. In Spain, unfortunately, farming enriches only the large cultivator, the wealthy proprietor, the absentee landowner, who nominates deputies, organizes Commissions, and has influence with the Minister. But not us, the poor farmers. Of course when I say us it is understood that I do not refer to you, Don Isidro. For this reason Martin

and Matias, my two eldest boys, will be millers, for they inherited my inclination and grit, and understand more about fertilizers and cultivation than I do myself. When they get down to mowing, I never saw men who could stand it like them. They are the kind that bend over the field when the day begins to break and don't remember to straighten up until night falls."

He smiled with paternal vanity and pride, and continued:

"But we are not all the same. Modesto, who is getting on to be fourteen, and Marcos, who will be ten on his saint's day, are more delicate, more genteel. I have therefore decided that the older of the two, who cuts a better figure, shall be a lawyer, and the other a doctor. And with God's help I shall see the fulfilment of what I have planned. I can't be indifferent to the future of the girls either. Marta has a sweetheart already, and we must make a good marriage for her. The other girls are already little misses and I have to buy them a new dress occasionally. All this is expensive."

He looked at Rionda.

"The sickness and funeral of my mother, the doctor will bear me out, also cost me good money; for when it comes to paying, my relatives always let me do it. Isn't that so, Rionda?"

Celedonio bit his lips.

There was a pause which Don Isidro took advantage of to say:

"And do you get on well with Leandro? I have been told that you don't."

The miller changed colour a little, and slowly, in measured tones which betrayed the weight of premeditation and rancour he attached to his words:

"My brother and I never understood each other, and never will. He takes after my mother—may God bless her! —and I after my father, and so our blood is different. Where he falls down and cracks his head, I rise. He doesn't

know the meaning of foresight. If he has enough to eat, that is all he asks for. While I am one of those who fasts today in order to eat tomorrow. Once in a quarrel—we do get along like cats and dogs, that is the truth—he became somewhat foolish, and I had to remind him that it was I alone who earned the money. Do you know what he answered? Says he: 'I know it. But more than the way you make it, I admire the way you save it.' That is what he answered! The books he has read have done him a lot of harm. He is a dreamer. Leandro lives the best he can, but I live as I want. I shape my own life, with the strength of my own will. His is shaped for him. He's the kind of man who thinks he is already mounted and riding, before he has taken the trouble to saddle the horse. That's the reason why we can't get on together. Of course he works! If he didn't I would have kicked him out of the mill long ago—pardon the expression—because I'm one of those men who say, 'Charity begins with myself' and the home is cared for later. But do you think that without my help he would be able to keep his own family? Not a bit of it! Leandro lives from hand to mouth. He's the kind that falls asleep thinking, 'Tomorrow, God will provide.' I was asking him not long ago, 'What are you going to do with Maria and Irene? Are you going to let Domingo do military service?' . . . All the answer he could give was a shrug of his shoulders. He may love his children but the devil take me if he shows it at all. And what he has done lately can't be forgiven."

With the thought that had just pricked him anew Manuel Santoyo had raised his voice.

"What has he done?" asked Don Isidro.

"He has taken Don Lotario's daughter, Agueda, into the family."

"They told me so," interrupted Celedonio Rionda, "and I told Leandro that there was no sense in that at all, and that his sister as well as I disapprove of it altogether."

"I'm glad you think that way," Manuel continued, "be-

cause I believe that Leandro and I will sooner or later come to blows or perhaps worse. The maxim says, 'Hatred of brothers is devil's hatred.' Imagine, last Sunday Leandro went to the café, and Diosdado and Don Blas, who have certainly succeeded in muddling his brain for him, began to tell him that Don Lotario was so poor that very often he went to bed without eating, and that it was everybody's duty to help him. It happened that that very day the teacher had given his daughter Agueda such a terrible beating, that if it had not been for Don Cirilo, who interfered, he would have broken all her bones. And Barral and the doctor took advantage of that to convince that fool brother of mine that he ought to take the girl home with him and adopt her, as it were. 'Don Lotario will be extremely grateful to you for that,' they told him, 'since you are relieving him of a mouth to feed; and the girl also, since with you she will live in peace and learn what her brute of a father refused to teach her, reading and writing.' You know how Don Diosdado and Don Blas can argue. If you allowed them to talk no jury would ever hang them, and that was all my brother seemed to need. Since his head was turned with those socialistic, or anarchistic ideas—or however you call them—which are everywhere nowadays, he agreed to everything they told him, and for the last four days Agueda has been sleeping at my house."

Scandalized that anybody should be able to contract so grave a responsibility in such a light spirit, Perez Cadenas pressed the palms of his hands against his temples.

"Yesterday," Santoyo added, "he bought her sandals because she went about barefoot. And last night he appeared at the mill with an A-B-C and copy-book. I don't know whether the girl is any good or not. Of course, though she appears to be a hard, willing worker, she is no use in the fields because that's not the way she was brought up. I don't want to call her ungrateful. But I go according to the proverb, 'No matter how you bring him up, another's child

will always go wrong.' And above all, if my brother can't even meet his own obligations, why should he appoint himself anybody else's saviour? In view of all this, Don Isidro, in order to give my business the push that I need and which it deserves, I came to you to borrow forty thousand reals which, with the interest that we may agree upon, I undertake to pay you back within four years."

"I think forty thousand reals is quite a sum," grumbled Perez Cadenas, for the pleasure of saying something, though in truth the affair did not displease him at all.

"It will have to be forty thousand," repeated the miller with his habitual sourness, "if you find yourself in a position to help me at all. Don't think that I talk without rhyme or reason. I'm no desperate man saying, 'Pull me out of here and later kill me, if you must, but pull me quick.' No sir, Pedro Santoyo's son knows very well what he is saying. No matter how much trouble I was in, I would never promise anything unless I was certain I could fulfil it. Though I may be a simple farmer, I have figured the whole thing out carefully . . . and I can tell beforehand what this deal will cost me and what it will give me back in return. I'm not the kind of man to walk blindfold into a quagmire. I leave that folly to young hands. You know, Don Isidro, that 'An old ox ploughs a straight furrow.' "

"It is understood," the usurer interrupted, "that as security for those ten thousand pesetas you will mortgage your mill?"

"Of course that is understood; I always play the game according to the rules."

Perez Cadenas turned his face towards his attorney, suddenly filled with pleasure and sharpened by greed. Rionda, however, trying to keep out of the business, looked elsewhere. Don Isidro was irritated by the fact that Manuel Santoyo had not sat down. The restlessness of the miller annoyed him. He liked to live in a leisurely fashion and was not satisfied to transact his business in this hasty manner.

After a few seconds of meditation, he answered:

"And how soon do you need the money?"

"Immediately. If we are going to do something, the sooner the better."

"We have to find out first whether Leandro is agreeable."

"My brother," the miller interrupted sharply, "will do what I say, and whatever I sign, he will sign too, in full agreement and concurrence. It isn't necessary anyhow, since fortunately the ownership of the mill with all its equipment is inscribed in the registry under my name."

"All the better. But we haven't yet spoken about the interest on the sum."

"It amounts to eight thousand reals, I believe."

"Exactly. Those two thousand pesetas represent the blessed little percentage that I charge everybody, and you must not believe that I would treat you worse than anyone else. But at this moment I am not in a position to give a positive answer to your proposition. The times are bad, and the little money that I reserve for these operations is scattered all over in unreliable hands. To bring together the two thousand dollars that you need is not an easy task. Therefore you had better give me three or four days' time to think it over. I shall study the proposition carefully and if we should not meet at the café, Celedonio will bring you my answer to the mill."

With these words, which implied agreement, he said goodbye. When Santoyo went by the square he again saw the black, immovable, fanatical eyes of Doña Gerarda fixed on him. Those scrutinizing pupils, like a probing conscience, gave him the feeling that the whole neighbourhood was looking at him.

With an itching desire to make up for lost time, Manuel Santoyo quickened his pace and in a few minutes left the town behind him. It would soon be ten o'clock and the sun was already fairly high in the heavens. The landscape was cut off on the north by Stark Mound and the Hill of

Fatigue, which, like twin shields of the valley, grew deeper in hue until they looked like lead when the sky was blue and acquired the tawny colour of honey towards twilight. The rest of the plain, warm, yellow, and fragrant, covered with ripe grain, stretched towards the horizon, and in the distance it seemed to undulate gently, giving rise to the conviction that the colour of the flaxen grain is the true colour of Life.

Far off, in the declivities, herds of sheep, stupefied by the increasing heat, huddled in rough, still groups, like scattered pieces of marble. The sun was scorching. The light down of the thistles became entangled on their thorns and on the dry, dark-green mulberry trees, where the poisonous tarantulas stretch their nets. A wave of heat as from hot ashes came out of the redolent and thirsty ground. The black poplars which lined the sides of the Vaquerizo and Guadalsazar, and the taciturn cypresses which mounted to the graveyard, rose rigid and very still; and in the tower of the church a white stork—that wonderful bird, at once home-loving and nomadic, which has taught men so well how to migrate—with its shrunken neck and long vertical legs, looked like a question mark, another allusion to "far and beyond." All drowsed, quiet and silent. Only at long intervals a gust of wind curled the wheat, bending it over, and the ears of grain turned and pushed against each other, flowing in waves like a current. Then the cultivated field seemed like an immense golden lake.

On the road Santoyo met, coming in the opposite direction, a cart loaded with water jars which was returning to town from the Fountain of Health, celebrated by "Don Profundo." Between the wheels, without coming out of the little shadow which the heavy reeling vehicle projected, walked a hound, his muzzle against the ground and his parched tongue lolling out. The cart, with its wet jars dripping freshness onto the dusty road, looked like a great mouthful of water gliding down a thirsty throat.

Santoyo and the ox-driver greeted each other as they passed.

"Good day, Manuel."

"God keep you."

Nearing his home, the miller saw a middle-aged man with a small sturdy body, and quiet but energetic face, sitting by the side of the road under the shade of a broom-shrub. It was a highwayman called "Mil Reales"—"Thousand Reals." He was very popular in the region as much for his violent hostility against the rich as for the alms which he gave the poor. Thanks to their grateful friendship he was easily able to evade the traps and persecution of the Civil Guard.

Santoyo and the bandit shook hands.

"I found out from Leandro that you had gone into town," said "Mil Reales," and I waited for you here, certain that you would return soon."

"Do you need anything?"

"Very little."

"How much?"

"Ten dollars. I have my horse at the smithy and since Bernardo is mayor I don't like to owe him any favours. Besides, I need ammunition for my gun."

Manuel's lips and eyebrows contracted simultaneously. In spite of his friendly relations with the robber, he was annoyed that the latter should demand tribute money from him. He welcomed him amiably for fear that the bandit would kill his cattle or set the grain on fire in revenge, as he had done to other farmers. At once proud and cautious, he hesitated a few minutes but finally temporized:

"I haven't sold my harvest yet," he said, "but if you're really hard up for the money, come to my house tonight about nine o'clock and I'll give it to you."

"Thanks very much. . . ."

Manuel Santoyo continued homeward at a faster pace. A sudden impatience possessed him, and in his passionate and

individualistic fancy a whirl of vehement egotism began to agitate him. The present indicative is conjugated by the Earth in a supreme way. No one can say "I am" with greater strength than she who perpetually renews herself. . . . The miller, greedy for life, wanted to imitate her. He had need to assert himself, to "be" . . . but in such an immediate and absolute plenitude that all his future, in spite of Time, would become actuality. The violently arbitrary and free figure of the robber was a lesson for him. Without any other means than his horse and his gun, "Mil Reales" compelled respect and made his own way in life. He had no gang; he operated alone and in this he was right, for when tied to associates a man always sacrifices something of his freedom and dignity. Only the weak make alliances and band together, only those of uncertain will, not the brave or the strong. Suddenly he applied the haughty example of "Mil Reales" to himself. His brother was in his way, and what was worse, impoverished him. Leandro, who had refused to help him by marrying the daughter of Perez Cadenas, was his enemy, a sunken rock against which daily, over half of his calculations and efforts dashed themselves stupidly. The dreamer Leandro and his family were an unnecessary burden for him, a load which would perhaps be the cause of the ultimate defeat of them all. Why had he received him into his house? Why had he allowed him to intrude into his life?

"If I could only get rid of him," sighed Santoyo, "eliminate him from my path . . . have nothing more to do with him."

And no sooner did this wish, like a clot of blood, make his spirit quiver, than he started and noticed that his hands were cold and moist with perspiration. Yet a few moments later his mad selfishness renewed itself.

"It wouldn't be so bad if I had to deal with Leandro alone," he reflected, "but the five nephews and that intruding sister-in-law of mine have to be considered too; and now

the schoolteacher's daughter into the bargain, all of them eating up half of what I earn for my children."

He was ruminating these thoughts when he arrived at the mill. To gain time he did not enter the house but walked straight past the yard and went directly towards the glittering field which glowed like a symphony in yellow, a mirror flooded with sunlight. Over the patches of high grain, glittering, metallic, reeling with light, the reapers in gangs of five or six bent as though peering into a furnace.

Men and women laboured in rows, excitedly, jealously. The shining blades shuttled to and fro over the level of the earth. Against the yellow warmth of the cut, wider at each stroke, the anxious, mobile outlines of the workers in their corduroy trousers stood out, with their coppery forearms emerging from the white sleeves of their shirts.

Martin, Matias and Modesto, Manuel's fourth child, assisted by a few day-labourers, worked at the head, followed by Domingo and Monica, who, lacking strength to do the mowing, made themselves useful by tying up the cut ears into sheaves. Further down near the threshing floor rose the lean figures of Leandro and Maria. Armed with pitchforks, they unloaded from a cart the bundles that had to be threshed. On the threshing floor the work, being in the hands of the women, seemed more varied and joyful. Agueda and Marta, the two older girls, quickly spread out the unthreshed grain, and with their shouts goaded the mule into greater activity. The animal pulled the harrow in which sometimes Irene and sometimes the Benjamins of the two families, Marco and Justo, pretending it was a triumphal chariot, stood laughing and playing happily. Gnashed by the iron and stone teeth, the ears of grain broke up and crumbled, yielding their treasure. And a damp and sweetish aroma exuded from its agony.

To carry out the work with the utmost efficiency all the operations were done simultaneously. Near the threshing floor, therefore, several young men, enveloped in a fine cloud

of yellow ochre, beat up the ears which had escaped the torture of the harrow. Rhythmically, the winnowing forks, with curved fingers white and sharp like those of a skeleton, sank in the grain, threw it high, and let the wind blow off the chaff. At another place, the seeds were sifted clean and transported to the granary.

Manuel Santoyo stopped a few seconds to contemplate the fruitful labour. Calculating the rich harvest and the excellent outlook of the weather, his nostrils quivered, and his eyes shone with greed and love of toil. He hurried towards Martin.

"Give me the sickle," he said, "and go to the threshing floor. See what the women are doing there, and hurry them up before the whole morning is gone. . . ."

Silent and thoughtful, his thin lips always well closed, like sentinels keeping guard over a secret, his son obeyed.

All the workers had seen "the master" arrive—for they called him so, as though his brother were not an owner also —and his very presence intensified their work. Yielding to an inherited instinct of obedience, each one tried to do better than the other, and in a golden current, with greater speed than before, the newly cut bundles were put into the cart which carried them to the threshing floor, after which they were winnowed and sifted. Perspiring freely, dark-faced, panting in the pagan heat of the sun, the gangs struggled untiringly. No one spoke. In the religious silence of the fields, as hot as red coals, only the cicadas, "master singers" of July, repeated warmly the magnificent, deafening and monotonous hymn of the mowing.

At one o'clock the work was interrupted; almost at once the mule hitched to the harrow stopped; the pitchforks were dropped like severed hands; the half-moons of the furbished sickles, like white rows of teeth, were left on the earth in front of the grain they were about to cut, and the men and women straightened up, gazing far into the horizon. Some slowly mopped with handkerchiefs the perspiration

which flowed over their necks and faces. Others, stretching, pressed their hands against their hips and at such times both men and women acquired a surprising elegance. Like the Arab, his distant kin, the Castilian farmer will always have a statuesque appearance. There is something dramatic in his simplest movements—when he glances at something or listens, or when he silently stretches his arm toward the distance.

Without hurrying, most of the help looked for a refreshing shade in which to lunch, while the girls, in speedy caravan, returned to the mill. And then, rid of the seething presence of people, the plain, all one colour, seemed to shine yet more intensely and the strident song of the cicadas vibrated with renewed effort.

Lying under the several sheds of boards and reeds which had been built around the threshing floor, the labourers rested. The sober repast finished, Leandro and a few of the men lay down to sleep. A few others sitting on the ground, smoked, commenting slowly on what had already been accomplished, and on what still remained to be done. Their conversation, like the valley, was simple and archaic.

"It looks like dry weather."

"As soon as we cut the last ears we'll begin with the fertilizing."

"This looks like a good year for the grape."

An old man added:

"We shall see about that. In the country, where we are at the mercy of God's every whim, prophecies are useless. . . ."

Aloof from these dialogues, Manuel Santoyo remained standing with his hands folded behind him, unmoved by the landscape. He could see as far as a few little white houses at the end of the meadow, on a height. His ambition stopped there. To buy this stretch of land he needed the forty thousand reals for which he had asked Don Isidro that morning.

"As soon as all this land belongs to me," he thought, "and

I pay off the mortgage on the mill, I will be the richest man in Carrascal del Horcajo. . . ."

While everybody else slept, the miller calculated and wove dreams, and his will—that marvellous will which in the tempestuous sea of life was sometimes a prow, and sometimes a cork which cannot be submerged—remained active and alert.

After two hours the women and children reappeared and immediately, but without haste, the work began again. Once more the implacable sickles shaved the earth, the ears spread their golden mantle over the threshing floor, the winnowing harrow revolved, the threshing forks threw the straw high, and in the sieves the seed was again cleaned. At the head of the reapers, far in advance of them, bending over the earth as over a woman furiously desired, Manuel led the cutting.

When in the distance the bell of the tower which rose above the town rang the eight peaceful evening bells, the workers suspended their grinding labour. The light was becoming dimmer each instant. A lovely opaline clarity presaged the coming of night. There slowly spread over the sky one of those starry and transparent Castilian nights like those of the sea. And in the distance the dark foliage of the trees acquired an unexpected intensity.

After leaving their implements under the sheds, the men went away.

With knitted brows, and the reluctance of a hound forced to leave its prey, Manuel Santoyo looked about him. Just when the work seemed to be going fastest, the people would leave! He asked Leandro, who had dropped his fork with a tired gesture:

"Are you going too?"

"Yes, my head aches and I don't feel well. I don't know what's the matter with me. . . ."

Without answering Manuel turned his back on him and continued working. Martin and Matias, almost as persever-

ing as their father, remained behind with him. The vigorous Marta and Domingo also stayed to help. Agueda, the daughter of Don Lotario, desirous of repaying the hospitality which she was receiving at the mill, drew strength out of her weakness and remained likewise. She was about fourteen years of age, and her weak under-developed body and colourless face expressed resignation and timidity.

Santoyo inquired of her:

"Do you know how to reap?"

She blushed; the master had never before addressed a word to her. She replied humbly:

"I will learn. . . ."

"That's the way to answer. Ask Domingo for a sickle, and take care not to cut your fingers off."

After that, no one broke the silence.

Rapidly, all along the length of a rich gamut of half-tints the light dimmed and the wheat fields turned dark. In the distance some cows ambled in a row following the twists of a narrow road which the grain hid from sight. And as the field acquired new shades, new murmurs filled it—the tinkling of bells, bleatings, neighing and the calls of the awakening night birds. Little by little the cicadas ceased their song, and the crickets—the poets of August—began theirs. In the slimy margins of the rivers and from the mud of the irrigation ditches the frogs began their croaking.

The first stars had already come out when Manuel Santoyo stood erect, signifying to his helpers that for that day the work had ended. With measured movements, as if being there or elsewhere were all the same to them, they all straightened up, and looked about them. From the mill a little column of smoke arose. Martin noticed it.

"Mother must have supper ready," he said.

He put the sickle under his arm, and gazing straight before him he walked towards the house with the long silent tread of a wolf. Quietly Matias, Marta and Domingo, one after the other, followed him.

They had walked over twenty yards when the yellow, flame-like eyes of Manuel Santoyo caught sight of Agueda, who had stopped to tie the strings of one of her sandals. His lascivious look stripped her naked. He considered her easy-going, docile, and unprotected, and suddenly he desired her with an appetite which shook him and flayed his sun-beaten flesh like a lash. In the throes of his lust, his rigid, muscular body and flushed face, to which the fine hooked nose gave an animal look, became taut and restless like a fighting cock's.

Unaware of the storm of passion she had aroused in the master, Agueda arose.

"Are you coming?" she said to him.

To catch up with Marta and Domingo, she started to run.

Manuel did not answer and a moment later, having recovered from this momentary madness, he went straight to the mill.

Quickly the night threw its black shadow over the landscape; the contours merged, and almost at once two lights shone out from the town.

A noisy flock of sheep moved in the direction of the river, weakly tinkling their bells. At the same time the moon, already beginning to wane, but still large and bright, rose over the horizon, and its cool light cast a blue-grey glow on the herd. The shepherd standing on a slope of the path, watched it go by. His tall lean body and his long arms crooked over the ends of the staff, which he held horizontally behind his head, formed a cross against the sky.

The mystic symbol harmonized profoundly with the humility of the plain, already silent and almost engulfed in darkness.

VI

FASTENED to the iron and wooden lattice-work of the porch which shaded the principal entrance to the mill was a rose bush; one of those magnificent Castilian bushes with large purple blossoms, so abundant that their tragic colour stands out above the fresh greenness of the leaves. Martin Santoyo had planted it eight years ago when he was still a boy and its trunk was now more than an inch and a half thick. Martin allowed no one but himself to care for it; and whoever among his brothers touched it, ran the risk of challenging the hatred of the first-born. On a certain occasion Matias plucked a rose from it, and Martin, discovering this, struck him over the head with a bottle and knocked him unconscious.

That rose bush was something taboo and sacred. It was a sort of pagan image, sanguinary and cruel, under whose lusty red caresses the covered entrance, upheld by four brick pilasters, looked like an altar. Every morning, before leaving for the fields, Martin watered, pruned and cleaned it, rid it of snails, caterpillars and ants, plucked the dry flowers and leaves from its branches, turned the earth over carefully around the roots, and climbing on a ladder, watered it from above to wash the dust from its leaves, so that it might breathe better and become more beautiful.

The emotional life of the youth seemed concentrated upon that plant, which with its passionate blossoms and sharp thorns lived in imitation of its owner, in silence. He

had a love for it that amounted to worship; he cared for it, tended it, sometimes contemplated it ecstatically, and on stormy days secured it with hooks to prevent its branches from breaking. Martin believed that the rose bush knew him—why shouldn't plants know their owners as animals do?—and that, grateful for his caresses, it was happy to see him. He liked to think that occasionally the waving of the branches was an expression of greeting. When he thought no one was looking at him, he would talk to it. The only flowers which, once a year, towards the feast of the Ascension, he ever dared pluck from it, were for the Virgin. All others, after kissing them, he buried near the trunk, with the assurance that, after decaying, they would return into the bush. Only once did he cut one for his own use, on Passion Thursday, and he hung it against his breast in a scapulary. Under an impenetrable exterior, like a burning coal which consumes itself slowly under its ashes without smoke or light, Martin Santoyo, with his wolf-like eyes and his wilfully closed lips, carried a rose bush within his heart.

In summer, seeking the fresh breeze which came from the river, the Santoyo family moved the dining-room to the porch, and in the torrid noon hour the gigantic rose bush, fragrant and bathed in sunlight, threw a colourful glow upon the inhabitants of the mill. Under this sinister purple halo, like an evil prophecy—for purple is the colour which most impels to hatred—the faces of the diners took on a strange fierceness.

Around the table, the wives gave place to their husbands, and the girls to the brothers—even to those who were younger than themselves. There, as in the barnyard, the hegemony of the male, proclaimed by Saint Paul, was not a subject for doubt. The meals, consisting during week days only of an abundance of meat stew, potatoes and beans, were served in four large dishes into which they all sank their spoons alternately. The men always took the choicest and largest portions. The women quietly resigned themselves to

this, conscious of their inferiority. Man is the owner, the germinator, the seed; woman is the earth; and this conviction, inherited and confirmed in the course of centuries by each new generation, made them submissive and self-effacing. In general all of them talked and laughed but little, nor was eating for them the joyful satisfaction of an appetite, but the observance of a duty with which they complied, in order to return to their work with greater strength.

Justifying the adage: "In Castile the horse wears the saddle," the offspring of Manuel and of Leandro repeated, each in his own person, certain of the physical and moral traits of their parents. The same was true of Domitila and Petra as of their husbands. Lean, bony, grasping, and tirelessly active, lacking the capacity to feel hunger or thirst or sleep, and capable—as she had demonstrated more than once—of getting up forty-eight hours after childbirth to do the family washing, Domitila reflected the stubborn and pitiless will of her husband. While Petra, generous, voluptuous and pretty, was a variation or extension of Leandro.

Because of Manuel's habit of standing up while eating and using a slice of bread as a plate, Leandro Santoyo occupied the head of the table, between his wife and his sister-in-law, who here as elsewhere always confronted each other. Martin sat at Petra's right, rarely moving his lips to talk, and after him, Maria, his cousin, who with her black hair, her large dreamy eyes, and relaxed, ladylike posture, was a note of beauty in that chorus of plebeian faces.

Tall and bony, with colourless face and curly reddish hair, Martin personified a sour intensity given to the most intemperate excesses. The weft of his nature was so strong and his chastity so rigorous that at times, in spite of the daily wearing labour, he suffered from cramps in his legs because of his virile needs. But he remained a virgin, fanatically certain that women—outside of legitimate wedlock —were a damnation.

Like the first-born, tall and obstinate and harsh, Matias, who had the habit when no one was watching of looking lecherously at his cousins and even at his sisters, whom he had pursued as a child, was a figure of mordant desire, of the kind that leads to stealthy peeping through keyholes into rooms where women are undressing.

Marta was hard-working, thrifty and envious like her mother, and her cold chastity could not be disturbed nor did it care for adornment. The character of Irene, red-haired and too tall for her age, promised to become irascible and meddlesome. Her cousin Monica on the other hand was stout, sly and hypocritical. Among the younger ones Mateo and Domingo were the best defined personalities.

Flaccid of muscle and somewhat careless in his work, Mateo was born old. In his face, with its sunken cheek bones, there was never any joy, and sadness is the first and most terrible expression of senility. Though he was not ill, he always seemed to be. He ate little and whimpered easily. The dominant trait of his character was avarice, the passion to which old age is most given. That child, conceived in fatigue, constituted an error, the weak link through which degeneration breaks into the progeny of the founder of a sturdy family.

His cousin Domingo was not cheerful either. Like Mateo, he liked ease and dark corners, and his hands were always open, begging. Nothing could move him. His father gave him his name, which means "Sunday," a name of which the workingman and the storekeeper are extremely fond, perhaps because of the very subjection in which they live, and he seemed to carry in his soul the heavy boredom which the sterile absence of labour on the holiday leaves in the spirit.

The Castilian soil, of whose wily austerity the thorn thistle might well be called the representative plant, had nurtured the souls of Manuel and Leandro Santoyo. And like two prolific and inimical roots, they reproduced themselves in offshoots each of which bore away some trait or

talent from the parent stem. And these tendrils, which now writhed about the household like a pail of worms, would themselves some day take independent root in the soil—or they would not—according to their own inherited strength.

Irene Santoyo would on exceptional days come to her brothers' for dinner with her two children, of whom the youngest, Cayetano, had recently drawn lots for military service. Another guest sometimes was Marta's sweetheart, Rogelio Garcia, son of the owner of the hardware shop. These special meals, which Domitila, jealous of her prestige as mistress of the house, would serve with greater care and abundance than usual, created a certain amount of animation. Tactful and tolerant, exercising the privilege her greater age gave her, Irene would try to smooth down with discreet observations the manifest hostility which separated her two sisters-in-law. Leandro would crack a few jokes, and the meal finished, Cayetano and Rogelio, alternately, would play the guitar and dance with the girls.

One afternoon towards the beginning of August they were getting ready to sit down at the table, when "Mil Reales" on a powerful black pony stopped at the mill. With the sudden appearance of the highwayman the gathering, though it had nothing to fear from him, became slightly perturbed, and Leandro, who was busy teaching Agueda to read, suspended the lesson. The guest dismounted with a leap, and leading his mount by the reins, approached the porch. His sunburnt face, though deeply lined, revealed its usual calm.

"Greetings to all!" he cried, two steps from the flowery doorway.

In a chorus, all of them answered:

"Good afternoon, 'Mil Reales.' . . ."

The women, particularly Maria Santoyo, looked at him curiously and in a friendly manner.

Domitila added:

"Do you want a drink or are you going to have dinner with us?"

"No thanks."

Addressing himself to Martin, who had stood up when he saw him, he asked:

"Where is your father?"

"He's not in. What do you want?"

"That is for him to know, not you."

This curt answer offended the young man. But though the feared presence of the bandit, on whose head there was a price, did not lessen his arrogance, he was prudent and replied:

"I left him on the threshing floor. If you want me to, I can go and call him for you."

"It's not necessary."

With a wave of his hand, he said good-bye to the whole gathering, and walked away leading his horse. On the other side of the yard he saw Manuel Santoyo, who, as was his custom, was the last to return from work.

"I'm sorry I have to trouble you again," said the highwayman.

Manuel could not hide his displeasure.

"What do you want? . . . You know I'm glad to help you, but it's hardly a week since I gave you ten dollars. . . ."

"That's right."

"You asked me for it in the morning, and before evening you had it. . . ."

"And I'm very grateful to you for that, too. Believe me, if I had not been forced to, I would not come this time. But I have to get away from this part of the country for a time and I absolutely need five hundred pesetas."

The miller stepped backwards as if he had been struck on the chest.

"Five hundred, did you say?"

"Mil Reales" did not answer, but his silence was an ex-

pressive affirmative. After a few seconds Manuel Santoyo added:

"That's too much for me; I can't give it to you."

"I am sure you can."

"I tell you I can't, 'Mil Reales.' It's impossible. The harvest has been sold already, but I haven't been paid yet. Ask anyone if you don't believe me."

"I know you haven't collected yet."

"Then where do you expect me to get this hundred dollars?"

Calmly the highwayman replied: "You are trying to deceive me, Manuel."

"I am telling you the truth."

"You're lying."

The miller grew pale, and the flood of anger which surged to his head filled his light eyes with blood. Unable to contain himself he exclaimed:

"Do you want us to be killing each other?"

"No, because right now you wouldn't let anyone hang you for forty thousand reals."

Santoyo understood, and his chagrin brought him back to the truth.

"So you've heard already?"

"The very afternoon you gave me those fifty pesetas we were talking about a minute ago, I found out about it. Your brother-in-law, Celedonio, let me in on it when I told him of what I was up against. Says he: 'Why don't you go to Manuel?' I objected, 'Because I just asked him for ten dollars, and I know he hasn't sold his harvest yet,' but he answered, laughing: 'Don't let that worry you. In a few days Don Isidro will let him have some forty thousand reals.' Now you will understand that if I'm here I'm not on the trail of empty smoke."

A brief silence followed, for there was no denying this information. Against the golden fields, darkened by the first haze of the evening, the bodies of the two men, the one

small and bent, the other lean and erect, were sharply drawn.

Manuel Santoyo was the first to continue the dialogue.

"I told you," he exclaimed, "that I had no money, and it's the truth. For though that dog of a brother-in-law didn't lie to you, the money I borrowed from Don Isidro I am entirely in need of for a little business project. I can't call it my own. . . . Do you understand? . . . And so I can't take a single penny away from that sum."

"You can, Manuel," the bandit insisted doggedly.

"I'm telling you I can't, 'Mil Reales.' . . . How else can I say it?"

At such a round denial, it was the bandit's turn to change colour.

"Have you thought it over carefully?" he asked.

Afraid of the harm his words might bring upon him the miller answered in a conciliatory tone:

"It's not a question of thinking it over, man. Why don't you listen to reason? Don't you see that that money isn't mine any longer, since I've already agreed to give it to Toribio Sanchez in payment for his lands?"

A new silence, stark and revealing like the land about them, cut the dialogue. "Mil Reales" added with tenacity:

"Listen to me. . . ."

"What?"

"Don't give me the five hundred pesetas, just lend them to me. . . ."

"I can't do that either. . . ."

"I promise to return them to you within a month."

"I can't, 'Mil Reales'; don't insist because I can't. . . . I'm really sorry. . . ."

The bandit lowered his head angrily and without so much as looking at Santoyo, who had stretched his hand out toward him, he mounted his horse and rode off at a gallop.

Manuel returned to the mill, worried rather than angry over the evil consequences which might result from his dis-

pute with the bandit. They were all eating already when he arrived, and his glowering face showed such preoccupation that no one dared speak to him. Without a word he took a piece of bread and a sausage from the table, and went out to the porch, as if the proximity of his family troubled him. A few minutes later he returned and facing Leandro said:

" 'Mil Reales' wanted more money. It's Celedonio's fault; he told him the story of my loan. I swear to you that that swine will never set foot in this house again. And I wouldn't be surprised if he was put up to it by Irene and she was getting a share of the money. She's as shameless as he is. . . ."

His anger turned quickly into overflowing fury, into hatred against all those who, in his opinion, were eating up his substance without helping him. He continued, addressing himself more directly to Leandro.

"You should have told 'Mil Reales' that I wasn't in, and I would have avoided meeting him. . . ."

"Martin told him where you were."

"Martin should not have spoken, you should have."

"Besides how was I to know what 'Mil Reales' wanted you for?"

"You could have guessed it. . . . But you worry about nothing and are good for nothing, except fooling about with your woman."

The desire to vent his hatred against some one, no matter whom, gripped his heart and unleashed his tongue. Ready to fight, Leandro rose to his feet.

"You don't need to bring my wife into this!"

"I don't, eh? . . . I do what I like. . . . You and she are nothing but trash."

They sprang at each other, but the others came between. And while Domitila, Martin, and Matias held Manuel off, Petra, Maria, Irene and Domingo, hanging to their father, paralysed his arms, and pulled him into the mill.

That night in bed, certain that no one could hear them,

Petra and Leandro discussed the violent scene. Petra was afraid. The poisoned air of that house had never been to her liking; she felt herself watched, despised and hated. . . .

"Manuel does not care for you," she told him, "and Domitila hates me with her whole soul. If she could kill me she would do it. I can't sleep in peace under this roof. Something unfortunate will happen to us here sooner or later. We ought to go away."

Drained of all courage Leandro sighed and in his memory recurred the common sense with which, one evening a few years back, his daughter Maria had argued against his desire to go away. What Maria had once said, Leandro, burdened now with a large family, re-echoed.

"Where can we go? And how?"

"Where?" answered Petra. "Any place: Cuba, Buenos Ayres. So many go and make a living, even make a fortune . . . ! We have no money today, you say? . . . We don't need it, either; for all our children, God be thanked, are already grown up and quite capable of earning a living. In spite of what my sister-in-law says, I can do as much as any other woman, and . . . listen, if we should go to America, as a last resort, while you, Domingo and Justo found work, Irene, Maria and I could go into service. Service is no disgrace, you know. . . ."

And she added prophetically:

"Rather than go on here, I would prefer the worst. You know I'm loyal. . . . Do you believe that Manuel's children love ours? Not a bit! . . . I hear them talking and I know them too well to think so. They think they are the owners and look upon us as if we're staying here on charity. That was the reason they kept the upper story when we divided the rooms, and gave us the lower floor; they think in that way they can sweep us out easier and throw us into the street. . . . Bless me, if we were ever to lose you—the Holy Virgin prevent it!—and she knows how I beg her every night to keep you—the day after your death, Manuel,

Domitila, and first of all Martin—for he's a villain, remember what I say—would drive us out with clubs in their hands."

"The true cause of all these hatreds," Leandro commented, impressed by Petra's words, "is my brother. One rotten fruit is enough to spoil the whole basket; it is enough for one member of our household to be hostile to us, then all the hours of our life are poisoned. If my brother did not set the example with his continual insults and humiliations—as he did today—Domitila's attitude towards us, and her children's, would be different."

In Petra's opinion, Domitila was even more intractable than her husband.

"Since she knows that you and I lived together before marrying, she still believes we are in state of mortal sin. . . . She has told me so many times. She also accuses me of not praying enough, of not being devout enough. Besides she can't stand me because I am younger and prettier than she. From the very first day she managed to order me about because she said she knew more about things than I did, and pretty soon her ordering turned to bullying. She treats me like a servant and likes nothing I do. She says I don't know how to wash, cook, sweep or even sew a button. . . . If I should ever take a nap for a few minutes after lunch, the devils fly away with her. . . . Because she saw me beating up my mattress one night she called me a pig. I answered her in fun, 'Don't you know that when a man and a woman love each other, the bed is never soft enough?' She became furious, and insulted me. She was eaten up with envy—she and Manuel never sleeping together. And it's always that way, in spite of all the care I take not to contradict her."

"All that care," replied Leandro, "is useless. To start strife between countries or between people, real reasons are never necessary. All that is needed is a pretext. And it's so easy to find one! But take my word for it, the worst one here

is not she, but my brother. Domitila has done nothing but absorb his humours and ape him. And the same holds true of the children. You know what the proverb says, 'In a musician's house everybody dances.' "

The dialogue was suddenly cut short by a strange sound coming from the yard which blended with the incessant rumble of the water of the mill; there was a brief and dull echo of something heavy and soft falling to the ground. Instantly Petra rose on her bed.

"Did you hear that?" she asked.

"Yes."

In the total darkness of the room, their necks stretched restlessly like a hare's ears. Then they heard the soft noise of a closing door, which they took to be that of the stable. After a few minutes of complete silence, they heard the tramp of a horse in the distance apparently following the direction of the river, each moment becoming more and more distant.

Santoyo was sure there was some connection between all these sounds.

"I'm going to see if anything has happened," he said.

Nervously, Petra held him, and the miller felt around his neck the pressure of her encircling arms, strengthened by the chill of fear.

"Don't go," the woman murmured; "don't go out, I beg you!"

Leandro bent over the bed reaching for his revolver, which every night he placed upright in one of his boots as a holster, without clearly reasoning why he did it. When his hand felt the handle he relaxed in warm relief.

"Perhaps a mule has gotten out," he argued. "Let me go!"

With redoubled strength Petra held him back, and there was superstition in her dread.

"Don't move . . . stay . . . don't move . . ." she murmured. "Nothing has happened. That horse that went by

must belong to some neighbour returning to town. If you go out, I go with you."

A restless premonition agitated her. Her husband, easy-going rather than cowardly, dropped the revolver, and remained for a long time listening. Besides the soporific murmur of the water flowing over the dam, and the croaking of the frogs, drunk with silence, humidity, and the moon, nothing else could be heard.

"Wasn't I right?" said the woman, relieved.

She seemed to be right. Slowly, the miller turned back to bed. They kissed.

"Good-night!"

And they fell asleep holding each other by the hand, as they were in the habit of doing, as if they knew that for the living, doomed to grow constantly older, the hours of the night, like those of the day, are always advancing along the road.

It was daybreak when Martin, who in imitation of his father slept fully clothed, entered the stable and saw, lying on the thick, dark, ill-smelling mattress of dry dung which covered the floor of the stall, the two best mules.

Their throats had been slashed. Whoever had dared to kill them had done it with a deft hand. They lay next to each other, the stiff legs bound at the fetlock. The halter which fastened them to the hook, drawn taut, still held their heads in the air. This gave their corpses a strange appearance. One would think that they listened attentively, that they could hear, and frightened, would suddenly jump up. The rising sun, filtering through the holes of the shed, sprinkled their bodies with golden motes.

The young man stood stock-still, shocked into stupidity, incapable of comprehending what his little yellow eyes reported. From the darkest corners of the sty, a few hogs observed him with fright, and he, with his feet faltering over the warm, soft, malodorous dung, heard them grunt, root up the ground, rub against one another. In a startled

rush a flock of hens, eager for the light, escaped cackling towards the freedom of the yard.

When the stupor of the initial impression faded, Martin's fury sprang into being; he cursed, threatened, lamented. He shook, kicked, pulled his red hair, and bit his hands until they bled.

"It was 'Mil Reales,' " he cried repeatedly; "it was 'Mil Reales,' to get revenge. . . ."

In answer to his shouts, which resounded tempestuously through the mill, everybody came running except Manuel and Matias, who were already on the threshing floor; Domitila, no less angry and pained, joined her cries to those of her son.

"It was 'Mil Reales,' it couldn't have been anyone else. Manuel should have given him the money he asked for. . . ."

Her black eyes were full of tears, and twice, beyond herself, she scratched her cheeks with her nails. All her children shared this fury, especially Marta, in whom the sense of property was acute. Petra and Leandro, not daring to relate what they had heard the night before, which they now understood, looked at the floor ashamed of each other.

When Manuel Santoyo was notified of what had taken place, he turned white but made no gesture whatever.

"It was 'Mil Reales,' " he said laconically.

He took up his sickle again, and stretching his arm its full length he continued with the reaping, breathing hard in a tantrum, as if he wanted to recapture in a moment by his work the money he had lost through the death of the two mules. Suddenly he looked at Martin and said:

"The threshing can't be interrupted; bring the oxen."

And from that moment his thin lips did not open again. An incandescent flame of hatred lapped his breast. He was tormented as much by the humiliation of which he had been a victim as by the loss, which might amount to five hundred dollars. His avarice and caution, which up to then had forced him to temporize with the bandit, were now overruled

by his ruffled pride. He would take revenge of his despoiler, today, perhaps tomorrow, at the first opportunity which presented itself, and the ferocity of his reprisal would be remembered. Should he go and tell the story to the Civil Guard? He did not even think of it. . . . Real men kill those who insult them, but don't carry tales about them. . . . Thinking about this as he went on reaping with furious energy, his muscles became taut, and before the angry hiss of the steel blade of the sickle, the grain piled in heavy swathes. Hatred galvanized him and pushed him on indefatigably against the golden stalks of wheat. Inflamed by his grudge, his entrails burned as if he were poisoned. The heat of the sun goaded his hatred, and if "Mil Reales" had appeared then the very heart of the bandit would have crumbled in fear.

In this infernal state of mind he spent the whole afternoon. When the sun set, after all the hired men had gone, Manuel Santoyo sat down on the ground to rest. His shoulders and arms ached, and his mouth was parched. Wide streaks of clouds, some purplish, some grey, coming from the south, hastened the brief twilight. Quickly the field turned dark. A fresh wind blew, and the moon, filling the sky with its pale light against which the cypresses leading to the cemetery drew their black profiles, bathed the landscape in the sad half-light of a Japanese print.

Suddenly Manuel Santoyo straightened up, pleased rather than astonished, having recognized in a man who advanced towards him across the wheat fields the figure of "Mil Reales." Slowly, and with his eyes fixed on the miller, watching his every movement, the bandit, with a gun held across his breast, walked towards him. It was obvious that the highwayman, knowing the greedy ferocity of his victim, wished to run no risk. Santoyo, unarmed, allowed him to approach, and waited until he spoke. "Mil Reales" stopped a few feet from him and said in a deep voice:

"I'm sure you didn't expect to see me so soon."

"You're right," said the miller, "but sooner or later I expected to see you, for I was going to look for you."

"I'm saving you the trouble."

There was five or six yards between them, a distance too great for Santoyo to clear with one spring.

"Wherever I do any damage," the brigand continued, "it's my habit to return in case the victim should want me for anything."

Manuel Santoyo compressed his lips. "Mil Reales" was provoking him, and he, unarmed, could not answer in kind. Realizing this, a treacherous, cunning idea wove slyly and silently into his honest indignation. To take revenge of his enemy he must deceive him.

"I wanted to see you, to tell you that killing my mules that way was a crime. . . ."

"If you had given me the hundred dollars I asked you for they would still be alive."

"It was a crime . . ." repeated the miller mildly with a beaten air.

"You shouldn't have refused me the hundred dollars," insisted "Mil Reales," "and much less when, against my principles, and only because it was you, I lowered myself to begging them from you as a loan."

"Do you want them now?"

"To refuse me costs blood. . . ."

"Do you want them now?" Manuel repeated.

"Mil Reales" looked at him in a cold, fierce, insulting manner as no one had ever dared to before.

"Now," he exclaimed, "I don't want five hundred pesetas, I want two thousand . . . do you hear me? Two thousand, and if you don't give them to me, I'll kill you on the spot."

Kindled by his own threat, his hands gripped the gun with joyous and violent excitement. Santoyo, with lowered head, pretended to think it over. He said: "Don't be vengeful. Why can't you be satisfied with a thousand.

Look, I'm willing to help you out."

"I said two thousand," the bandit answered, "and two thousand it will be. I stick to my word."

Manuel seemed resigned.

"Then I suppose I'll have to give it to you. Follow me. . . ."

"Where to?"

"To the mill. You know I don't carry it around with me. . . ."

Certain of himself, brave to the point of temerity, the bandit walked behind him.

In order to win his confidence, Santoyo, instead of following the fence which bounded the yard, and led to the porch, took a deep footpath which went by the pond, and led to the foot of the old tower where the mill was. Between the dwelling house, new and whitewashed, and the high cylinder of the old fort, yellow ochre in colour, there was a small irregular space, a shadowy sward in the midst of which "Mil Reales" stopped.

Not hearing the sound of his steps, Manuel Santoyo turned his head.

"Aren't you coming?"

He pointed to the door of the tower—a little iron door, under whose arch the road leading to it seemed to glide like a snake. The bandit made a negative gesture.

"I won't follow. . . ."

"Why not?"

"I don't want to. . . ."

"My people are eating; we're alone. . . ."

"I'll wait for you here."

"Are you afraid?"

"Mil Reales" looked up and regained his composure when he made certain that there were no windows in the wall at the rear of the house.

"I'm not afraid," he replied; "but I know you, and I don't want to go in."

Manuel crossed the threshold, and in a flash, putting his agility to the service of his fury, made for his gun, which he always kept loaded with two bullets. Almost immediately he reappeared—the whole action taking only a few seconds—and aimed this gun at the bandit. "Mil Reales," who was not expecting him so soon, realized that he had no time to defend himself. He threw himself on the ground . . . but Manuel had already fired and wounded him. Running towards him, he put his foot on his neck and finished him with a second bullet through the temple.

The death of "Mil Reales," terror of the countryside, and despair and shame of the Civil Guard, who for a long time had been hunting him, gave the picturesque figure of Manuel a brilliant prestige. For a few months he was a popular idol. The country papers, and finally those of Madrid, commented on his feat. Never had his erect figure stood so high as now, with the body of the bandit for a pedestal. The first time after the episode that he crossed the square of Saint Martin on his way to Paulina's café, hatless and with his jacket on his shoulder, Doña Gerarda, in honour of the hero, rose from her chair—something she never did—and came out onto the balcony.

In the café he was the centre of attention. Paulina declared that she had foretold that "Mil Reales" would die near a body of water, and this prophecy, which evidently alluded to the pond of the Santoyo brothers, endowed the event with a superstitious halo. "Don Profundo," the mayor, Paco Camacho, and above all Perez Cadenas and Hernandez Halcon, spoke constantly of the miller and did not tire of praising him.

"Very often," Don Blas would orate, "we have complained of the vulgarity of our environment. 'In Carrascal del Horcajo there are no men!' we have often said. But we were mistaken because there is one, one! . . . who has been enough to make our town spoken of with praise throughout all Spain."

Whether it was because Barral really thought so, or because he gave in to that hidden aversion he always felt towards Santoyo, the truth was that the triumph of the miller did not fill him with enthusiasm.

"As for me I certainly am glad!" Don Blas would exclaim, "because that cut-purse, horse thief and murderer was the shame of the district. Only a rotten society can tolerate such types. And therefore I say that in killing 'Mil Reales' Manuel deserves the gratitude of us all."

"I take the liberty to remind you," answered Don Diosdado, for whom the most delicious dish was contradiction, "that Santoyo did not kill face to face. . . ."

"But he wasn't fighting a gentleman!"

"The quality of the enemy does not matter. In his manly deed there is just enough odour of felony to lessen his glory. Manuel, as he himself says, accepted the demands of 'Mil Reales' without losing his temper, pretending to give in to them, and he did this in order to gain his confidence. Then he led him to the mill, and taking him by surprise, shot him down. Each was worthy of the other. They were like as two peas. I believe that 'Mil Reales' and Manuel could easily have changed professions without much difficulty, and the bandit could have been a good miller while Manuel could be a perfect criminal. You can say what you like, my dear Don Blas . . . but from the picturesque point of view, Carrascal del Horcajo has been the loser because, of the two notable bandits we had, one is gone."

And he ended sarcastically:

"If Manuel Santoyo killed 'Mil Reales' it was not through love of the town, as you suppose, but due to the subconscious rivalry of the profession."

The corrosive irony of the chemist exasperated Hernandez Halcon, all the more since it was shouted in a loud voice, from one table to the other, with the intention that everybody should hear it. All those present, with the exception of Don Isidro, portentous "Don Profundo," and the

corporal of the Civil Guard, greeted the sally with smiles.

Celedonio Rionda, jealous of the success of his brother-in-law, could not resist the desire to share a little of his glory, and explained his intimate connection with the tragic end of "Mil Reales." He claimed that the robber had dared to ask the miller for five hundred pesetas and later for two thousand, because he, Celedonio, advised him to, certain that Manuel would kill him. The trap, therefore, in which the famous bandit fell had been prepared by him.

Excited by the confessions of the pettifogging lawyer and by the commentaries made by those about him, Leandro Santoyo also contributed his share of information. He related how "Mil Reales" had appeared before the porch of the mill when the whole family was sitting at the table; told of the altercation which later occurred between his brother and himself because Manuel had blamed him for allowing the bandit to go and see him on the threshing floor, which difference would have ended badly had not the family intervened; and lastly, he told of the noises which he had heard in the yard, that night when he was in bed.

"Since then," he concluded, "Manuel and I have not been speaking to each other."

The chemist, who listened to Leandro Santoyo's words attentively, became deeply serious. He knew the antagonism which year after year became more intense between the brothers, and he was certain that there was tragedy brewing.

"When things begin to get crooked," he said, "we ought not to think of straightening them. We should leave them. I, in your place, would move away from the mill."

Surprised, Leandro raised his head and looked at Don Diosdado with a troubled expression.

"My wife has told me that very thing," he exclaimed.

"And that will be the advice anyone at all interested in you will give you."

Around the cheerful table presided over by Barral, the

voices had become muffled, and the conversation proceeded slowly and in a thoughtful temper.

"Celedonio is listening to us," the pharmacist continued, "and I'm certain he's of my opinion."

"I certainly am, Don Diosdado."

"Am I right or not in what I am saying?"

"You are perfectly right. No one can put up with my brother-in-law outside of his wife and children. He is too domineering, too much for himself. May the devil take him! It's five years now since I last set foot in his house, and I have forbidden Irene to go there."

The owner of the hardware shop and Paco Camacho assented with nods of their heads, an expression of their complete agreement with Rionda's opinion.

"If I am at all sorry for my son's courtship of Marta, it is on account of the father-in-law he is going to have."

Barral looked at Leandro:

"Do you see? . . . We all think the same. You had better keep away from Manuel. In order to do it you don't need to quarrel. It's enough if you trump up any excuse and move into another house. After you do this, you can ask him for your share of your father's legacy, which is entirely fair, as he can't deny, and . . . that's the end!"

"That's difficult," murmured Leandro dejectedly.

"Very difficult indeed!" interposed Celedonio.

"Difficult . . . why?"

"Well, my sister Irene got married and I had to go off into service. . . . You know what happens . . . my brother, once alone, thought: 'This is my opportunity,' and bribing some and threatening others, he managed to have the whole estate, with whatever it contains, registered under his name. And now, I, at this moment, don't own a single handful of land."

The chemist exclaimed indignantly:

"What a fool you are, Leandro!"

The miller shook his head sadly:

"Please understand me, Don Diosdado. If I never wanted to insist on my rights as owner it was not due to stupidity, but because money matters have in them something offensive to me. I don't like to talk about money. I feel that when I say, 'This is mine and that yours,' my mouth becomes foul. One time—I was still single—I proposed to Manuel that we should divide the land that our father left us, because he had me working at a wage and couldn't give me the amount I needed. After much argument, and in order to persuade me not to make a division, he proposed that I should take up my quarters at the mill after my marriage. 'Whatever belongs to one will belong to both.' . . . And I, fool that I am, accepted. That's the way it has been to this day. That was nineteen years ago, the age of my oldest daughter. During all this time neither I nor mine have lacked bread and butter. But the truth is that after working like an animal, day in and day out, I haven't a penny saved for my funeral! Manuel, on the other hand . . ."

A shrug of the shoulders, full of bitterness and disdain, completed the phrase. Leandro continued with his eyes fixed on the table—on that marble slab which had once been a tombstone, and that now seemed to bear down, like a burden, on his wasted life.

After a short pause, Don Diosdado repeated:

"What a fool you've been!"

And then, with a seriousness unsuspected in him:

"Had you thought of the future of your children you would not have acted this way. Did you forget that the 'Jealous God' of which Exodus speaks, punishes the faults of the parents even unto the third and fourth generation? The careless way you have provided for your children is no less than an iniquity."

Breaking the silence which followed these words, uttered with profound vigour and full of foreboding, Leandro Santoyo whispered:

"I don't believe Manuel is capable of denying me what

is my own . . . but to get it from him, I have to go slowly and use good judgment."

"That won't succeed," Rionda insisted.

The miller repeated sighing:

"You're right. That won't succeed. But we are all in agreement; either in a friendly way or otherwise I'll have to separate from my brother."

Barral concluded:

"I'm talking to you without mincing words, Leandro, because I love you."

"I know that very well, Don Diosdado."

"And in the name of that love, which is so genuine that it does not even expect gratitude in return, I beg you to carve in your memory what I am going to say. In Carrascal del Horcajo there are two rivers, the Guadalsazar and the Vaquerizo. The former is a tributary of the Tajo, and dies in a dignified manner; while the latter, born of its brother, is finally lost, consumed in a miserable fashion by the earth. Leandro Santoyo, you who live on your brother, who cultivates for his profit the land which before the law is yours, you do not shine with your own light but with reflected light. Be careful not to be like the Vaquerizo."

And he added, rising and standing on his short leg, which was the leg of his pessimism:

"Manuel is evil; Manuel is capable of the worst. I am sorry to tell you so, but I believe it. You should fear him and keep on your guard against him. Flee from him. He is your ruin. And don't forget that his initial is that of Murder, and that even such accidents as that are sometimes forewarnings."

VII

EVERY Thursday morning at six o'clock the old yellow stagecoach left the little square of Saint Martin, for Soria, which it reached after stopping at several small towns. The departure was a spectacle to which the painful farewells of the travellers lent a dramatic character, and which from their balcony window Doña Gerarda and her daughter watched every week with keen curiosity.

Half an hour before the time of departure the coach, hitched to three pairs of mules, drew up in front of the church. Soon the little square, still almost dark, became animated with the presence of two members of the Civil Guard, the arrival of small wiry men in shirt-sleeves, and of little women, the majority in their bare feet, who, in order to be able to enter the church for warmth, threw their outer skirts over their heads like a cowl. Little by little the seething of people about the stagecoach gave rise to a low murmur in a subdued and prayer-like tone. Still sleepy, they spoke in voices muffled by the sadness of departure and separation. From time to time the silence was broken by the harsh noise of the harness or the impatient pawing with which the mules shook off the gad-flies.

About this time, his crutches tapping a rhythm on the uneven cobblestones, the disconcerting figure of Lisardo, "the cripple," always appeared on the square, bent under the weight of his ninety years and of the bag in which he kept the alms of vegetables and food he picked up. Whining in-

gratiatingly, he approached the travellers. His dramatics and the blessings with which he urged them to alms-giving always succeeded in coaxing a few pennies out of them.

At six o'clock the coachman climbed to the box, picked up the whip and the reins, and the stagecoach was off, jogging on its ancient wheels. An instant afterwards it disappeared through the narrow aperture of the inclined street, barely wider than the coach itself, and behind its merry clatter silence eagerly began to spin its silken filaments anew. Those who had come to see the coach off slowly separated in silence, looking at the ground, and in the empty square the only one who remained was Lisardo, who took his place at the entrance of the church.

These little scenes were exquisite titbits for the sleepless curiosity of Doña Gerarda and Alfonsa.

"Tomorrow is Thursday," they said to each other every Wednesday night before going to bed. "We have to get up early, it's stagecoach day."

This purpose, this ingenuous desire to see, spurred them to getting up early the following morning without the slightest sign of laziness. More so than her daughter, whose flesh as well as her spirit was bloated, the wife of Perez Cadenas kept careful account of all those who came into or left town. Her spirit, much more curious than compassionate, associated itself for a few minutes with the pain of those who were emigrating—boys who had drawn lots and were leaving to join their regiments, girls setting forth in search of service, nuns ordered to another convent, needy families driven to the New World by hunger—an aching heart travelled in each of the forty seats which the coach contained. All of these unhappy people, whom sometimes military or ecclesiastic discipline but more often poverty plucked from their native land, harmonized sadly with the figure of Lisardo. On Thursdays that little square was a symbolic picture wherein—against the bas-relief of Saint Martin sharing his cloak as a background—was regularly reiterated

the ruinous and humiliating absurdity that it is not Work but Charity of which the poor have need.

One September morning, shortly after the stagecoach left, Doña Gerarda saw Manuel Santoyo leaving the church. The miller walked stiffly, so absorbed in his calculations that he did not nod his head to greet the old lady, as was his habit. In spite of the good feeling she had for him since he killed "Mil Reales" two years ago, the old lady was offended by his indifference, which she thought was more likely the result of pride than of absentmindedness. The haughty character of Manuel and the increasing prosperity of his fortunes provoked her into putting the blame there.

"When a lout is on horseback"—the words of the proverb came to her mind—"he recognizes neither God nor man!"

Then she wondered what had brought him out of the mill so early.

"He's probably going to Paulina's Inn for a drink."

But remembering that Manuel did not drink, she continued her monologue:

"No, he's not going to the café; he must be going to the chemist's; perhaps some one is sick at the mill."

And she added: "I haven't seen Don Lotario today; I wonder what is the matter."

In fact it was to the pharmacy that the miller was going. Since his quarrel with Lucas, Manuel shaved himself and had Domitila cut his hair; and he passed the barber shop without looking at it. Under the porticoes of the square he greeted several acquaintances without a smile, not even stopping to shake hands.

"Hello there!" he said.

He strode on, his gaze high, the strong jaw set tight, and his head unmoving as if nailed to his knotty neck.

He arrived at the pharmacy as Barral, who had just gotten up, was opening the sliding doors which protected the show window, a task in which Santoyo helped him in order not to lose time. They entered the shop, and Don Diosdado,

from the height of his good leg, on which he preferred to stand when he arose in good humour, asked him slyly whether he came to buy a physic for the family.

"It's not purgatives I want, but fertilizers," Manuel replied.

"What's the difference? . . . You can't deny that it comes to the same in the end," exclaimed Barral, bursting into laughter.

Ignoring the jest Manuel went on to give his order.

He asked a few questions about the advisability of adding ashes to pigeon and chicken dung, and as to whether this fertilizer, on account of its great strength, should be employed during the rain, which would dilute it. He then said good-bye to Barral and told him that the order he had just given him would be picked up by Martin early that evening.

Manuel Santoyo had barely reached the other end of the square, when Leandro entered the pharmacy.

"Did you see your brother?" Barral asked him.

"Fortunately I didn't."

His pale face and his tired posture told clearly of the worries and discouragement that beset him. He dropped on the bench where the clients waited for the filling of their prescriptions, rested an elbow on the counter near a plaster bust of Hippocrates, drew a heavy sigh, in which there was anger mixed with sadness, and twice, with both hands, brushed back his grey hair.

Invited by Don Diosdado to confide his trouble, since confession always relieves, he replied:

"The troubles that afflict me are many. And they are getting so entangled that if I believed in the Devil I would swear he had come to live with us at the mill. The first clash of the day was brought on by Agueda."

He could not continue, and as he pounded on his knee with his right hand, he sighed deeply again and looked upwards in despair. Barral advised him to calm himself, reminding him that anger is a beast which wounds those that

feel it rather than those that are the cause of it. Leandro continued:

"You have never become acquainted with Agueda, you don't know her at all. . . . Of course not! Who would take notice of a girl at most sixteen years old? . . . Yet I have never known a better person, or one capable of creeping into one's heart so soon. You know how much I love Maria, don't you? Well, I love Agueda as much, and it is absolutely true that if I were forced to choose between her and any one of my daughters, I would not be able to decide. It frightens me to think of the beatings that that brute of a father must have given her to make her what she is! She is sweet, humble, a willing worker, she always keeps her peace and she lives only to please us. She takes nothing in an ugly mood and does what she is asked without wheedling or flattery and with cheerful submission. She was born to be of service. At table very often I believe she has not had enough and I ask her, 'Don't you want any more?' She usually answers, 'No thanks, I've had enough.' But I insist and tell her for example, 'Why don't you have some more of these potatoes?' and she eats them. Or on the contrary, I say, 'You have had enough,' and she drops her fork instantly. At night, after supper, I see her sitting in a corner—because she looks for corners as if she were frightened by people—and I ask, 'Are you sleepy?' . . . She replies, 'Of course not!' She answers like that because she believes that I'm going to ask her to do something. I insist, 'You must be sleepy,' and she retorts, 'Of course not, how could I be?' Then I say, 'It makes no difference, sleepy or not, you had better go to bed.' And, without a word she turns in. Her first gesture is always a negative one, and that's probably due to her desire to know exactly what we want of her, the better to be of use. And she's very pretty too! If you consider her features separately, you'll see she is, though she may not look it at first glance. You understand me, don't you? There's pain in her features, in her magnificent black

eyes, in her thin yellow face, in the fineness of the nose, which makes her ugly—a racial pain, the accumulated suffering of centuries. Like Castile's, the beauty of Agueda is sad, mystic; a beauty never to be understood by anyone who doesn't take the trouble to examine it at leisure."

Eagerly interested in the words of the miller, Don Diosdado sat down next to him in a friendly attitude which stimulated confidences.

"She was very badly treated," continued Leandro, "in her own home by her father, who not only did not give her enough to eat, but would almost kill her with his beatings. But I have my doubts whether she is better off with us. That's the naked truth! . . . If I speak to you frankly, Don Barral, it's because we took it upon ourselves to be partners in saving her. How hard I have tried to teach her to read no one will ever realize. But in that environment no one can do anything but work, eat and sleep. Ours is the life of mules in the fields! I don't know how many primers I have bought for her, and how many notebooks. The boys tear them all up. One pours water into the ink-pot, another hides her penholders, and when they see her writing they all make fun of her in chorus. Add to all this that when the poor soul returns from work long after sunset she can hardly lift her feet, Manuela's family, my sister-in-law especially, have said to themselves: 'Let her sweat for what she eats,' and treat her like a dog. And now listen to the worst—this is what drives me nearly crazy. Since we will begin to harrow soon, because the land for the wheat must be prepared early in September, we all, each according to our strength, help in the weeding. But Agueda was never taught this or any other farmwork. What she does is altogether out of her good will, and as if by a miracle. This morning, then, shortly after she went out to the field, and while she worked over a bit of stubble, she cut the two middle fingers of her left hand almost off."

This bit of grim news made Barral get up on his short leg, pale and stammering:

"How horrible! . . . What a terrible thing to have happened to her. . . . We must call Don Blas immediately!"

Confused, he tried to start towards the door. Leandro held him back.

"Don Blas and Don Lotario have already been notified. I have just told them myself, and they must be at the mill by now. It is Manuel who doesn't know about this yet. He left early this morning to look at a herd of sheep."

In pitiful and vehement words the miller related the details of the mishap.

Maria and Agueda were cutting the stubble together separated somewhat from the others, when the teacher's daughter, who walked ahead, stood bolt upright and gave a loud scream.

"My hand," she wailed, "my hand!"

Maria answered her cry with another as strident as the first. She had seen the mangled hand of Agueda, from which two fingers hung loose, bathed in a torrent of blood, and she hurried to the support of the wounded girl, who had fainted and fallen on her back, cold and intensely pale. Crazed with fear, Maria began to kiss her and to cry for help. Those who were near came running in answer to her cries and carried Agueda to the mill. The ever-chaste Martin lifted her by her arms, and Maria by the feet; Matias, who was holding her by the waist, with shocking inhumanity, made use of the opportunity to satisfy his lecherous curiosity. Inert, limp, her colourless face towards the sky, the lips altogether bloodless, the poor girl looked like a corpse.

"With vinegar compresses and a good bandage I improvised," added Santoyo, "we managed to stop the flow of blood. But when she came to, and remembered what had happened, she fainted again."

He continued talking, and the memory of his adopted

daughter's suffering tortured him so intensely that Don Diosdado felt pity for him.

"All right, man, you mustn't despair on account of this! . . . You are not responsible for it. Besides Agueda has not only saved her little finger, but her index and thumb, which are the most important for work, so that she's not entirely disabled. You should resign yourself with the thought that something worse might have happened."

Leandro looked at the chemist.

"You don't know whether I have worse things to tell you! Didn't I tell you a minute ago, if I were superstitious I would think that the Devil had moved into the mill? . . . There's a proverb which says, 'Welcome, evil, if you come alone!' and I am certain that never was greater truth uttered, for pain and trouble always come entangled with one another, each pulling the other in. This time the misfortune comes from my sister-in-law's side. . . . And I don't doubt she has, in spite of her small size, more poison in her than my brother has in him. Manuel says she's very good . . . and I don't doubt she is, for him. But does he say it from the bottom of his heart? . . . No indeed! Domitila obeys him, and serves him well, because she's afraid of him. She knows her husband has a heavy hand, and she bends her head. . . . If you call that goodness! . . . That kind of goodness doesn't please me. I judge by the maxim, 'Cursed is the tree that gives fruit by force.' . . . My wife is different, and out of that springs the antipathy they feel towards each other. From the very first day—as you know—Domitila hated Petra. I'm not saying she insults her, though everything she says even when she is not being directly insulting, has always been offensive and annoying, because, as they say, 'The accent tells more than the words, and the tone in which you speak can poison.' . . . Forgive me for quoting proverbs so much! . . . As time went by the hostility between them has increased. They've come to the

point of not speaking to each other, or sitting down at table together. . . . What do you think of that? . . . 'In the Devil's household everyone for himself.' We have been getting along that way more or less, until today what I had been fearing happened at last."

"Do you mean they had a scuffle?" Barral interrupted.

"Yes sir; and what pains me most is that Petra got the worst of it."

The dispute had started right after Agueda's accident—she had been put to bed until the doctor came—and it took on an aspect of incredible ferocity on the part of Domitila.

All the personnel of the mill, with Leandro at the head, had returned to the fields, and Domitila, Petra, Irene and Maria, remained at the mill loading a cart with manure they had taken from the yard. Petra and the two girls worked with pitchforks, and the stench of the fertilizer was so acrid that it forced them to close their eyes. Suddenly, thinking the loading was not going fast enough, Domitila threw her implement in a corner, and went at it with her hands. Her bony tough arms sank greedily above the elbows into the manure heap, and lifting she raised herself erect pressing the fetid load against her body. That insane way of working scandalized Leandro's wife.

"Doesn't it make you sick to do that?"

Domitila turned quick and poisonous like a scorpion.

"Other things disgust me more."

"What things?"

"Having anything to do with you, for example."

"What's this, all of a sudden?"

"You shameless slut, you!"

Petra did not answer, and her contemptuous silence irritated her sister-in-law still further.

"I am as much a lady as you are," she shouted, "if not more . . . but I know how to bend down to work when necessary! . . . You should too, you easy trollop. You

should stay in bed less and work more, if you don't want us to say we keep you out of charity."

Cut to the quick, Petra faced her:

"Who dares to say that? . . . You better mind your words! . . . Neither you nor Manuel are keeping me here. I belong to my husband and if we come down to it, it's he who is keeping me. The mill belongs to all of us."

Her arms akimbo, swaying in a provocative manner, Domitila measured her sister-in-law with an angry stare.

"That's a dirty lie!" she shouted wildly; "the land belongs to whoever works it most. When Leandro came back from the army, wasn't everything the way you see it now? Manuel never even needed his brother. It's just the other way!—Leandro came back to town without a penny; he didn't know how to handle a sickle . . . he didn't want to do anything but to go to the café and chase after women. And Manuel took him back, taught him to work and gave him wages. Later, worse luck, he got tangled up in your tricks . . . and . . . why should I go on?"

"Go on, go on . . ." replied Petra.

She had dropped her pitchfork, on which she had previously leaned, and nervously began to pull her sleeves up, getting ready to fight.

"Well, I've said enough," vociferated Domitila. "You're her on charity . . . do you understand now? . . . Neither my man nor I nor my children need any of you. . . . Do you hear? Cursed be the hour that Leandro came back from his regiment! You brought with you quarrelling, hell and waste into this house . . . and you don't deserve the bread we dole out to you."

Maria and her sister, up to this point spectators of the scene, thought it was time to intervene.

"That's enough mother, enough," advised the elder gently. "Keep quiet; why do you talk to her any more?"

Petra, with a gesture of disdain, picked up her pitchfork and went back to work. Domitila, venting her uncontrollable

fury, continued to insult her. For a long time her voice vibrated stridently under the cobweb-covered roofing of the stable, and her words whipped the backs of the three women like lashings. In her dry and colourless face, to which the dark ebony of her straggling hair added an intense paleness, her black eyes burnt furiously, and her jagged teeth, a yellow streak between her bloodless lips, gave her a fierce and bestial expression.

"Won't you shut up?" said Petra suddenly.

Domitila went towards her, with the evident purpose of attacking her.

"Do you want to fight?"

Petra lost heart.

"I want to live in peace with everybody."

"And don't think I'm afraid of you," declared Domitila gathering courage. "Manuel is every inch a man, and I'm every inch a woman, too, small as I may be. I could beat up you and your two daughters. I'm just as ready to take hold of the three of you by the hair and throw you out of here. You're shameless swine and loose sluts."

The victims of this vituperation, astonished, stared at the spluttering woman. Maria had turned pale; Irene flushed violently. The vilification against the girls gave Petra back her courage.

"If you insult my daughters," she said, wielding the pitchfork, "I'll batter your head in for you."

She had barely made her threat when Domitila assaulted her, grabbing her by the throat with both hands. Petra, though without courage, instinctively seized her by the hair, and in so doing scratched her face. They wrestled. With the sting of the scratches, Domitila's strength redoubled, and pushing her enemy—whom she surpassed in physical energy as well as in courage—towards the mangers, holding her half prostrate, she continued to throttle her. Maria and Irene came to their mother's rescue, and the terrible shrew, seeing them coming, turned to keep them off with her kicks. But

Irene, bolder and stronger than her sister, closed in upon the aggressor, paralysed her arms by hugging her with all her strength and by tugging at her finally threw her out of the stable.

Nothing further happened at the time.

Consumed by her grudge and furious that she had not been able to take complete revenge on her sister-in-law, Domitila went into the kitchen. There, hanging from the hook, in a pot full of boiling water, were cooking some fifty pounds of potatoes for the hogs. She had just lifted the lid of the pot to see if it had boiled enough when Petra, who did not expect to find her there, came in. No sooner did Domitila see her than she made straight for her.

"Now that you've no one to help you, you're going to pay for this. . . . How do you like that?"

"Let me alone, I don't want to fight," Petra begged.

Domitila struck her.

"So, are you satisfied?" she hissed between her set teeth.

Without attempting to defend herself the younger woman, paralysed with fear, stood rigid, while her sister-in-law, with savage delight, struck her two more blows with her clenched fists.

"Like this, all alone, that's the way I wanted to get you!" she snorted in fury.

Her eyes flashing, face tragically sallow, looking ragged and thin in her black woollen dress, Domitila was terrifying.

"Do you see these scratches?" she continued, showing her face to her victim.

Petra did not say a word.

"Do you see them? . . . in my left cheek they are, which means you made them with your right hand . . . Well, you'll see what I have for you!"

She fell upon her, and taking her by the waist, with unexpected vigour almost lifted her towards the fireplace. Petra, suspecting the horrible torture that her sister-in-law wanted to inflict on her, defended herself desperately until,

realizing she was beaten, she tried to throw herself on the ground. But her attacker prevented her by pushing her from behind at the risk of throwing her bodily into the fire, and gripping the right arm of the frantic woman, and pulling at the whole weight of her limp body, she plunged the hand into the boiling pot.

Petra began shouting.

"Help! . . . Help! . . ."

Her cries of terrible anguish reverberated throughout the whole house. Suddenly, crazed with the pain, she made a tremendous effort and managed to pull her arm a little from the pot. Then she yielded, entirely exhausted by the cruelty of her punishment. Her adversary once more overwhelmed her and for the second time her tortured hand disappeared in the horror of the boiling and steaming water.

Startled by the cries of their mother, Irene and Maria rushed into the kitchen at the same time that Domitila, satisfied with her revenge, let her victim go. Without the strength to say a word, reeling on her knees, stupefied by agony, Petra, tears in her staring eyes, showed her daughters the horrible ulceration of the raw scalded flesh. Before that terrible sight Maria fainted outright and fell to the floor. Not so Irene. Without hestitation, blind with fury, she snatched up the fire shovel, and throwing herself upon her aunt, gave her several blows on the head that felled her to the floor, with blood spurting from her wounds.

It was then that Leandro, who had also heard Petra's shrieking, came running into the room.

"That was my luck!" concluded the miller. "Had I arrived a minute sooner, that is, in time to witness the torture, I would have killed my sister-in-law right then and there. But just wait . . . the day hasn't ended yet. . . . Now we have to see what attitude my brother will take when he hears about all this. . . ."

Leandro finished and a dark disquietude clouded his resolute face to which his greying hair seemed to communicate

a sort of melancholy. Don Diosdado smoked and glanced frequently at the light of his cigarette with absorbed intentness, but his attention was not focused there; and Ursula, the wife of "El Migao," who came in to buy a few pennyworth of arnica, and another neighbour who came for two reals' worth of sedative water, were waited on without a word. Then he invited Leandro to come into the back room, where Clara Luz, Barral's wife, greeted them. She was plump and small, rosy cheeked, with lips and eyes always smiling, and abundant hair naturally curly, and of the purest white.

The back of the store consisted of a cheerless room, almost bare of furniture, on whose walls hung pictures of the famous bullfighters, "Frascuelo" and "Lagartijo," both then at the height of their career. Next to these hung the portraits of Canovas del Castillo and Sagasta, great leaders of Spanish politics at that time, and to Barral's mind very much like the two bullfighters. Canovas' thrust in Congress reminded Barral of the capers of "Frascuelo" in the arena, and Sagasta's left hand, with the help of which he orated, was not second in elegance or dexterity to that with which "Lagartijo" made his graceful cape passes. Near these four celebrities were to be found the portraits of numerous actors of the day. . . . There was also, under the clock, a photograph without frame or glass, in which appeared a group of over twenty schoolmates of Don Diosdado, and which the chemist, mindful of the inevitable death of all these boys, called the "common grave." Through the vine, which crept along the bars of the window, there sifted into the room a soft green light.

Leandro took a seat, and in a short time began to feel much better.

Clara Luz had a sincere affection for the miller, of whom she considered herself the spiritual mother on account of the many books she had given him to read from time to time. She was a woman of many invaluable qualities. In spite of the

arid environment which had always surrounded her, her emotional life still retained its youthful richness. Capable of intense feeling, æsthetic sensations moved her deliciously, and very frequently absorbed her so intensely that she could not sleep. To her, a beautiful book was a reflection of some ancient pain refined by Art and Time. This illusion alleviated much of her own pain. A witty talker, tender, winning and effusive, she even hated to receive a letter in which the coldness of its writer's heart left a blank page. As a young girl the experience of reading a book of poetry or a novel which she liked very much, would excite her nervously to such a degree that she felt she must don her best dress and adorn herself with her finest jewels.

"The day in which I have the good luck to read a good book," she would say, "is for me a holiday. I cannot remain at home. My feet itch. I have to be out, to visit my friends, to talk to everybody, to distribute alms. Joy overflows in me and I can't help but sing. All the sedatives in the shop would not be sufficient to calm me. I become changed. I remember, on the afternoon that I finished reading Chateaubriand's *Atala*, no one could convince me that it was not a holiday. . . ."

"My wife and Paco, my brother-in-law," Barral explained, "are a little mad; but there is the same great difference between them, fortunately for me, that exists between a sane man and a fool."

How could one measure the huge spiritual abyss that separated Doña Gerarda, the sleepless sentinel of the square of Saint Martin, from Clara Luz? . . . And to say Doña Gerarda was to say Carrascal del Horcajo, because the recluse, fanatical and sordid wife of Don Isidro personified the soul of the harsh, silent town—a town born out of ruins—which never read a line, or laughed or underwent any mental change. Doña Gerarda and her daughter symbolized whatever was mummified, sterile, inmovable, as against the chemist's wife, who, in the midst of such desolation, imi-

tated the wild rose bushes which hung miraculously from the old, battered, cracked tower, and covered the crumbling merlons of the battlement with a vernal crest.

It was not the thirty thousand pesetas that the daughter of Sebastian Camacho brought with her that moved Don Diosdado to marry her, but a well-founded preference. The potential actor that he had within him was drawn immediately towards the artist that was within the soul of Clara Luz, and love sprang up between them. They seemed to have been made for each other, all the more so in an environment where no one could even distantly compare with them. They could have been exhibited as a model couple. Both enjoyed literature and music, and Clara Luz could play the piano with rare ability. The day after their wedding they began a book called "Our Diary," which was a portrait of their naked souls. Their fondness for fiction, for the theatre and the opera, was shown in the romantic names they gave their children—Andromaca, the oldest, born at the time her mother was reading Racine; Julieta and Otello, born during the four years that their parents had spent reading the complete works of Shakespeare; and Armando, after the lover of Camille.

In the utter psychic aridity of Carrascal del Horcajo, the Barral couple, well read, understanding and hospitable, represented an oasis for Leandro Santoyo, and thus that day, acknowledging himself more lost than ever in the dark gully of his many troubles, he fled for refuge to the chemist's shop.

With a few words Don Diosdado informed his wife of all that had happened at the mill, and Clara Luz was very much moved and troubled, realizing in what a difficult position Leandro found himself.

"Our poor friend!" sympathized the noble lady, "you are good and love your wife and children; Manuel also loves his and is good to them. And I don't doubt that both families love each other much more than they will admit; and yet

you cannot live together. What an inscrutable paradox, that the pain and hatred of the world are kneaded precisely out of the love and kindness of each individual!"

"Why should you be surprised," observed Barral, "since the eyes of one person are not strictly identical with each other, that the eyes of our brother are not identical with ours? And not being like ours it is obvious that they will not see things in the same way that we do, and this dissimilarity of vision will carry with it diversity of opinions, and from this sooner or later comes hatred."

Turning towards Leandro he added:

"I must insist today that you remember my old advice; you had better separate from Manuel. And please admit that if you had done it immediately after we spoke of it the first time, you would not find yourself as you do today. I do not recommend you to make use of extreme means—never! I'm an evolutionist. In order to get out of the blind alley from which you can barely escape now, and into which your inertia and your lack of foresight got you, I think persistence in breaking away would be better than violence. You should imitate Time in this respect, who without hurry, minute after minute, creates and disintegrates everything. Don't break open the doors of the mill, but push them softly, and go. I hope you can still do it."

His elbows on his knees, his eyes on the ground, Leandro listened bewitched by the sibylline intonation of his adviser.

"I am of pure Castilian stock," continued Barral, "and as such I love my country. Castile is not picturesque like Andalusia, nor given to effects in its landscape like the Basque provinces, Galicia or Asturias; nor is she urged by the progressive restlessness of Catalonia. Castile doesn't flirt, doesn't aspire to beauty, doesn't try to preen herself. I have compared her to the sincere and loyal woman to whom we can give our hearts without jealousy; who, if she is with child, will not try to appear slim, and who will give suck to her children though her breasts may lose their beauty.

Castile is true and constant. But she is also harsh. I claim to know her defects. History, daughter of Geography, is the imaginative reflection—if you will allow me the phrase—of her august mother. And this explains the roughness of our genius, which borders on brutality. Castile lived always in war. The question, 'Who goes there?' and the answer, 'Friends,' with which its inhabitants greet each other, testify that peace is a rare fruit among us. Though the purity of the sky and the gold of its harvest may tell you differently, nothing about us is either blue or yellow; everything is black, dismally so! . . . In our town, as in the other towns of the Iberian plateau, the word charming is considered offensive, and therefore anyone born gracious or tender tries not to show it, afraid that his kindness, which no one responds to, will be taken for a sign of effeminacy. About us we see greed, envy, lust, fanaticism, hatred . . . above all hatred! . . . but don't look for tenderness here, because you will never find it. In obedience to obscure and hypocritical rules of conduct, we try to cover up all that exists in us of passion and rebellion. We are sly, distrustful and deceitful. We are tortured by lust, and we try to appear chaste. We are ambitious, and we act as if we are indifferent. We feel like laughing, and we cover up our hilarity and hang our heads, ashamed of feeling cheerful. The fires of the Inquisition are still burning among us. I have often told Clara Luz this. Domenic Theotocopuli, called El Greco, when he painted that haunting picture of his "Knight with his hand on his breast," livid, in mourning garb, and with his right hand upon his heart as if to still whatever impetuosity beats within him, that man was portraying Castile."

Many other observations, all of them to the point, were adduced by Don Diosdado to demonstrate the need which Leandro Santoyo had of leaving behind him not only the mill but the town as well.

"The Santoyo family," the chemist continued, "is a representative family. I can see in you something racial, some-

thing deeply buried and abysmal. An evil doom envelops you all. You are one of those families of violent blood, which Destiny seems to elect for the purpose of breaking new ways."

A pause followed these visionary words, which Clara Luz took advantage of to say:

"Listen, Leandro: I don't want to frighten you with what I am going to tell you—Diosdado will bear me out—but last night I dreamt that I had gone to the mill to visit you, and I was surprised to see that you, Manuel and Martin—isn't that the name of Manuel's oldest son? . . .

"That's his name," answered Leandro in a depressed tone of voice.

"Well, I was very much surprised, I say, to see you three dressed in red."

Gloomy and pale, Leandro did not answer.

"There is a danger hovering over you," Barral continued, "and its threat comes nearer to you daily. The savagery of Domitila to your wife, and the very just reprisal of Irene, are facts of great importance. What has happened will bring grave consequences, because if today your women fought, tomorrow it will be Manuel and you, and an encounter between you would be tragic."

"I'm afraid for your sake," said Clara Luz.

The miller smiled:

"You don't need to be on my account; I have good hands."

"Nevertheless, when it comes to heartlessness and rancour, your brother is your better."

"That's true. . . ."

"And courage is of little use when it's not backed by tricks. Besides he is the legal and only owner of your house, which gives him a decisive advantage over you. Even your children do not only obey him as an uncle, but respect him as 'owner.' They may not be conscious of this feeling, perhaps, but they have it, I'm sure. By legal right and in fact Manuel is the

owner, the chief, the master. . . . The whole town recognizes that."

"Before the law you don't possess anything," corroborated Barral, who had followed the thoughts of his wife; "and therefore in this quarrel, you are the weak one. 'The poor man is consumed by the sun,' says the adage, and this merely reaffirms the words of Saint Matthew, according to whom 'whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance; but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath.' . . . It's in the twelfth verse of the thirteenth chapter that the Evangelist says this. You can apply it to yourself. No one will dare to dispute Manuel's title to his goods, which enables him to feed those who work his lands, and which he can put up as guarantee for the purchases he makes on credit. Because the rich man is feared, he is given credit, he is helped. 'He is a man who can be given anything he asks for,' say the people. On the other hand, if the poor man has anything, people think he acquired it dishonestly. This is your case. And therefore you should not be surprised if they should sometime throw you out of the very corner where your mother gave you birth."

He went on:

"Here in our house, as in many others, we love you well. You can remember how quickly you gained the sympathies of the townsfolk, shortly after you returned from military service. Then your brother became jealous of you and began to hate you; and that rancour has increased until now it's consuming him."

"Diosdado and I often talk of you," interrupted Clara Luz. "Last night—I believe it was night—we were going over the Old Testament, and my husband maintained that you and Manuel call to mind the first book of Moses."

"And I can prove it!" exclaimed the chemist, rising; "wait a minute. The only way to comment on a text is to have it before you."

With long strides he left the room. A few moments later he reappeared with a copy of the Bible in his hand. With the satisfied air of one who anticipates a long and enjoyable conversation, he sat down.

"The fratricide to which Genesis refers," he said, "threatens you, because the motives which determined it repeat themselves now. Of the children of Adam, Cain was the oldest, and he cultivated the land. Men subjected to the slavery of the plough are the strongest, the most avaricious, the most tenacious, and therefore the most to be feared. One might think that, like Antæus, Mother Earth feeds them through their feet. And thus Cain was stronger than Abel, and when they quarrelled, Cain had the power to kill him. Less greedy than his brother, the second son liked to travel, to explore new lands, to remain idle while his imagination built castle upon castle in the air . . . and therefore he turned shepherd. Cain, thirsty for riches, increased his holdings. Abel, more the artist, idled and looked towards the horizon. In your family, Manuel is Cain; he has the same occupation and is also the first born. And you, Leandro, if in your wanderings through the world you did not tend sheep, you did tend illusions; you are Abel. Manuel represents energy, violence, obstinate and fruitful activity. And you, sympathy and friendship. For this reason, though we recognize you inferior to your brother in many respects, we prefer you to him. The same preference was Jehovah's with the second born of our first parents, and that was the reason why, full of envy and hatred, Cain murdered him."

Don Diosdado was silent for a few minutes while he arranged his ideas, and then, with persuasive accent, addressing himself to Clara Luz and the miller in turn, he continued, moving the index finger of his right hand rhythmically in the air like a conductor's baton.

"If you were single, I wouldn't mix into this matter, but you are married and have five children, and if you were ever to fail them, they would have to go out and beg alms. . . .

If you were to quarrel with your brother, and should you be killed by him—nothing easier, you know—do you believe anybody would think of punishing him for it? I don't think so! . . . His fame as a bully would shield him. People would say, to be on his side, that you provoked him, and they would excuse his crime. Manuel, at present, is a little dictator, and once rid of you, he wouldn't take more than twenty-four hours to throw his sister-in-law and nephews into the street. The story wouldn't be at all new. See what Genesis relates about what happened after Abel's death, whose blood, says Jehovah, 'Crieth unto me from the ground' —and I suspect still continues to cry, for humanity springs from Cain. The fratricide, pressed by the questions of Jehovah, confesses his crime, and when he learns the tremendous punishment that must be meted to him he complains bitterly."

With his back to the window, to have better light for his reading, Don Diosdado began to read slowly:

"'. . . And Cain said unto the Lord, my punishment is greater than I can bear. Behold, thou hast driven me out this day from the face of the earth; and from thy face shall I be hid, and I shall be a fugitive and a vagabond in the earth; and it shall come to pass that every one that findeth me shall slay me.'"

"That is the way it should be," said his wife, "but unfortunately that is not the way it is."

Barral continued, beating time in the air with his finger:

"'And the Lord said unto him, therefore whosoever slayeth Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold. And the Lord set a mark upon Cain, lest any finding him should kill him.' From that I deduce that iniquity, if it is committed by the powerful, is not a crime. The Sacred Gospels consecrate it. Do not expect then that your ruin will be the cause of any harm whatsoever to him, since Jehovah or Fate—or however we want to put it—having made him rich, having placed him in a position to acquire wealth, put a mark on him, 'lest any finding him should kill him.' I

must repeat, therefore, the advice I have already given you so often. The attack which Petra has just suffered offers you an excellent opportunity. Another one will not present itself. Make use of it. As soon as you return to the mill, before your brother has time to speak to you, speak to him—this will permit you to take the offensive. Tell him, 'After what Domitila has done, I cannot continue here. I'm going. Let me have as much money as you can. And good-bye . . .' And go; don't let covetousness hold you back. Take what they give you, and start off. For you know that 'Honour and profit can't go into one bag,' and in your position, to say 'honour' is the same as saying 'life,' because your life is in danger."

Leandro did not answer this little speech. He did not even raise his head, which for a long time had drooped on his chest.

After a short silence, Clara Luz confirmed the ominous words of her husband with her opinion:

"Please, Leandro, please beware! I agree with Diosdado; I advise you to go."

"Manuel and you hate each other," continued Barral, "with a hatred which grows greater every day. Very well; what must be, must be. You pay him back in kind. . . . But hatred corrodes, it's a negative emotion; and remember my reading of the fifth verse of the twentieth chapter of Exodus, which I gave you once before. God is creation, the supreme All; He is Nature, with all that is contained within it. And thus, whosoever hates his brother, in the person of his brother hates and offends God. To hate is to blaspheme. And let's not forget that the jealous and strong God of the Sacred Book takes revenge on those who hate Him upon their children unto the fourth generation. Nothing that the biologists ever wrote on heredity can surpass what these implacable words contain. The physical or moral errors of parents will be paid for by their descendants. And mind you, syphilis, tuberculosis, leprosy, and hatred—hatred, which I put among

the number of specific diseases—are the four offences which Divine Justice punishes with most rigour.

"Cain killed the body of Abel, but he could not destroy his spirit, symbol of the disinterested desire for immortality, glory and beauty, which adorns our brief and sad life. This is demonstrated by a distant descendant of the fratricide, called Lamech, who had two sons: Jabal, 'the father of such as dwell in tents and of such as have cattle'—which we must understand to mean, the father of practical individuals with foresight; and Jubal, 'the father of all such as handle the harp and the organ,' that is to say, of the artists, slaves of adventure and emotion. For this reason you, Leandro, who inherited the blood of Jubal and of Abel, are a poor man, and will end your days in misery."

When he had said this he rose again and closed the book, indicating that the conversation had ended. He walked towards the door, beyond which, in the thickness of the wall, there were three steps which led to the private rooms of the house, above the shop. Here he stopped for a moment, slightly at profile, and in an attitude which reminded one of the queen's usher in the "Meninas," of Velazquez, he turned back his head.

"For the last time," he exclaimed, "beware of Manuel, and get away from him. Don't try to compete with him. And if you love your children, take them out of the mill as soon as possible. Don't compromise their future by wasting your time in hating those who know how to hate much better than you do, because your hatred will fall upon them. . . . Flee! . . . Before Cain killed Abel he should have killed himself; but he did not do it, and since then Cain kills Abel every day. Don't forget that now, as in the days of the patriarchs, the roots of life are watered with the blood of brothers."

VIII

THE fierce scene between Domitila and her sister-in-law was followed by a silence which had something of a stupor in it, as though the whole mill, conscious of what had happened, were terror-stricken.

In answer to the tortured cries of Petra, Agueda rose aghast and as best she could helped to dress the wound with her useful hand. She attended to Maria also, who, recovering after her first fainting fit, broke out into sobs and fainted twice again. Sitting beside her Agueda, who loved her intensely, murmured consoling phrases into her ear, softly and soothingly kissing her cheeks.

As soon as Leandro had gone in search of Don Lotario and the doctor, Petra, with her hand bundled up like a stump and her eyes still bloodshot from the pain she had undergone, came out onto the porch. Irene had gone into her room almost regretting her fit of revenge. As for Domitila, no sooner had she attended to her own wounds by applying some vinegar to her contusions and tying a handkerchief around her head, than she continued her work in the yard, with amazing endurance and stoicism. Ignorant of what had happened, the rest of the family remained scattered in the fields, each one minding his own task, and for a long time the mill was full of silence. The only voice one could hear was that of the water murmuring loud and clear over the stones and boulders in its bed.

At ten in the morning the teacher and Don Blas arrived

together, the latter on horseback. Immediately Domitila and Agueda, who recognized the voice of her father, came out to receive them. Manuel's wife took for granted that her brother-in-law had not told the doctor the truth of what had happened. She said to him, looking warningly towards Petra—enjoining her to keep silent—that her sister-in-law, taking a pot from the fire in which potatoes were cooking for the pigs, had scalded her hand, and hearing her cries she had hurried to her aid in such haste that she fell from the ladder of the dovecot, bruising herself badly and cutting her head in several places.

Hernandez Halcon expressed his contempt by his silence, answering not a word to these explanations, which Petra had not belied. After carefully bandaging the three wounded women, he and Don Lotario left, leaving strict orders that Agueda should remain in bed, for the girl had fever.

The mill became mute again, and in its rooms, with their high, whitewashed walls, the murmur of the water resumed its clear interminable whispering-song.

The dissimulation which Domitila had used with the doctor, and in which Petra, through her silence, had become an accomplice, was the result of the dread which Manuel inspired in each one of them for different reasons. Though violently rancorous herself, the fear that Manuel, carried away by his irascible character, would do something punishable by the law, often induced Domitila to play a conciliatory and tolerant rôle. The ferocity with which the miller beat his children, especially the boys, was so great, he gloated over the punishments with such brutality, that sometimes she ran the risk of a beating herself, by declaring herself responsible for the slips and stupidities which her children had committed.

She had acted the same way between Manuel and some business associates with whom he had had dealings long ago; for when it was a question of money between himself and

a man, Manuel admitted no delay and accepted no reasonable excuse.

"No one," he said, "will ever owe me a penny; because if I can't get back in cash what he took from me, I can get it back in blood."

He had adopted this savage phrase as a motto, and more than one neighbour in Carrascal del Horcajo could have testified to the care with which he lived up to it.

Shortly after his marriage—and this was a notorious fact which no one had yet forgotten—Manuel lent one of his ploughboys sixty reals, on condition that he pay them back within the strict limit of three months. The first two months, the poor man met his promise, but when it came to the third, he begged of his creditor an extension of fifteen days, to which Santoyo finally, and grudgingly, agreed.

The following month the debtor hid himself instead of coming to the mill to settle his account. Not even his family knew his whereabouts. Getting wind of this, the miller set out to look for him both in the town and throughout the countryside, even to the neglect of business of greater importance. At last one evening after dusk he met him in front of the town hall, and gave him such a clubbing that he left him for dead.

This outrageous assault, which put its perpetrator in danger of going to jail, was a warning to Domitila. From then on, whenever any of the small farmers or shepherds to whom Santoyo lent money to buy either farming tools or seeds, could not settle in time, Domitila would advance the sum from her savings, making it clear that if he did not return the money she would tell the miller. Under this threat no one of her debtors ever defaulted. And in this way she came to enjoy the fame of being a gentle and compassionate woman, a helper of the poor, a reputation which of course she did not deserve in any way whatsoever.

Faithful to her purpose of softening or avoiding whatever might irritate her man, the woman kept silent about the

fight. Petra, her daughters and Agueda, needing no words about it, unanimously followed the same course. But it was not the mutual agreement of their hearts, but the fear they had of Manuel that—like an invisible orchestra conductor—united them in the same restrained harmony. Considering what might happen if Manuel and Leandro should at last come to blows, Domitila feared for her husband, Petra for hers, Irene and Maria for their father, and Agueda—especially now that she was wounded—for her protector.

Absorbed by these worries the five women let the morning go by. It was about eleven when Manuel Santoyo returned to the mill walking briskly, his jacket on his shoulder, his head upturned towards the sky as if in communion with it.

The attitude of Petra, who was idling with her bandaged hand under the flowery portico, displeased the miller.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

Disconcerted for the moment, Petra did not answer. He went on in the direction of the fields. Irene, from the closet in which she had entrenched herself, and Agueda and Maria behind the lattice panes of the balcony where their fear held them watching, looked at him in cold, silent fear. They were like sheep that see a wolf go by. When they saw that he continued on his way, they looked at each other in relief and felt that they could breathe more freely.

It was much later, long after dinner, from which Leandro was absent, that the miller, by putting together unfinished phrases and linking the furtive, hostile looks which his children and nephews darted at each other, began to suspect that something had happened. The misfortune of Agueda did not surprise him. He remembered having told her the first time she had done any mowing to be careful not to cut a finger off.

It was therefore a logical and foreseen mishap. On the other hand he could not quite explain Domitila's bruises. Instinctively he associated them with Petra's burnt hand,

the concentrated silence of Irene, who barely remained a few minutes at the table, and the absence of Leandro. The latter appeared after the noon meal had finished, and when he returned to work, joined the men who were busy with the manuring. This impressed the suspicious vigilance of his brother, whose yellow eyes with their pale lashes glanced curiously from one group to the other.

"He's keeping away from me," Manuel thought; "he doesn't want to talk to me. I shall soon know why. . . ."

Assisted by his sons, Martin and Matias, and taking advantage of the fine condition of the ground which was neither too hard nor too soft, he was busy with the harrowing.

The grey field, ploughed up and lined with long parallel furrows, looked like an old roof on which the burning heaps of dead vine shoots, hemp stalks, and hay bundles banked with earth, smoked like chimneys. More than twenty people walked to and fro over the breadth of this slightly undulating dark plain, to which the haystacks, like army tents, imparted a warlike aspect. The two glittering colours of the month of July—gold and blue—and the lusty song with which the cicadas had celebrated the harvesting of the wheat, were already gone. Now the dark chestnut-coloured earth, almost black, sad as though worn with continual parturition, took her rest. The heavens, already empty of swallows or martins, were less blue than before, and when night fell the air became heavy with a depressing humidity.

The cart used for the carrying of the fertilizers left the yard loaded to the top with dry dung. Swaying under its stinking load, it crossed the fields at the slow pace of the oxen, stopping here and there to drop its contents. This sort of manure, like that taken from the sheepfolds, had to be burnt and spread as soon as possible, to prevent the atmospheric changes from depriving it of its active properties, and also to mix it opportunely with the first rains, which according to numerous indications would soon begin.

In this and in other operations the men were employed; while the women, more careful and more patient, cleared the ground of weeds, planted the carob beans and vetches used for fodder, covered up those vegetables which next month had to be transplanted to sheltered land, pruned the cauliflowers, and plucked the parsley.

Animated by the example of the overseers, the field hands, divided into gangs of three or four, laboured unrestingly without lifting their heads. In some places they hoed and did the second ploughing; in others they planted the barley and the rye; in the wide plots, which surrounded the pond, they cut channels to drain off the excess of the coming rains; and in the deep silence of the fields the enriching bustle, which scattered life about itself, had a cheerful solemnity.

The best worker of them all was Manuel Santoyo. His activity never ceased for a moment. When, at long intervals, the great fatigue of his arms compelled him to rest them for a moment, his spirit, gnawed by ambitious plans, looked on impatiently. He was tortured by the fear of not accomplishing all his schemes in the briefest time. However fast he could run, the earth, renewing itself incessantly, would always keep ahead of him. To stop a minute—his heart told him—was to let it escape, to lose it.

His cares beset him like angry bees. After carefully turning up the ground, he had to prepare to plant the wheat and the rye, yet not neglecting the fields that lay near the cemetery, which, being poorer and more exposed than the rest, had to be cultivated first. The permanent pasture land, too, required his attention. During the months of September and October the farming operations were exceedingly varied and numerous. The fodder of the animals had to be modified by substituting hay, in which salt, crunched barley and oats were mixed, for the green grass which daily became less wholesome. It was also necessary to take care of the rams, so that they would be vigorous in breeding time; fatten the

suckling pigs, separate the pigs which were good for bacon only from those which would produce fine hams and good pork. It was imperative to examine the places where the sheep, very susceptible to disease, would pasture; separate the animals which it was advisable to keep for breeding and domestic use from those that had to be sold, for the price of the latter diminishes with the winter. One had to occupy oneself also with the manufacture of butter and cheese; had to prevent dampness by mending the leaks in the roofs of the granary, stalls, and cattle sheds; to prepare for the picking of the grapes, and for the work in the wood lots.

Manuel Santoyo meditated on all his duties, and on the manner of accomplishing them as briefly as possible, while he dried the perspiration from his face with long strokes of a handkerchief. He looked greedily about him, and his restlessness was that of a commander-in-chief preparing for an assault. With the help of Don Isidro he had doubled the breadth of his possessions, which now extended from the banks of the Guadalsazar in the east, where the mill stood, to the small hill where the graveyard lay, in the west. Towards the north, his grounds extended beyond the rich furze, thyme and rosemary which covered with green the skirts of Stark Mound. Disliking to associate with anybody, the shrewd miller, tight-fisted and exclusive, felt his isolation. The rain-laden atmosphere and the grey half-light of the landscape oppressed his heart. How much work, how many sleepless nights, how many difficulties awaited him before that dark land, in whose entrails life seemed to sleep, would again be covered with the splendid gold of the wheat!

At dusk Manuel Santoyo, Martin, and Matias, took the road back to the old house. Because the footpath was too narrow for the three of them, the second son walked behind. They had gone for a few minutes in silence when Martin suddenly asked:

"Father, what do you think of what mother's told us?"

Manuel kept silent.

"Do you believe," continued Martin, "that she really fell from the tower ladder?"

Since Manuel did not answer, his son added:

"I think that story is a lie."

But the miller did not say a word. His brows had knit with an evil thought. Martin, wary of his father's bad temper, kept silent.

When he entered the kitchen, Manuel Santoyo asked about the sick women.

"I don't know where they are," Domitila answered. "I suppose they're in bed."

Her back to her husband, Domitila shrugged her shoulders and leaned over the fire where a piece of beef was cooking. It smelt appetizingly of onion and laurel. The weedy, wrinkled, parched little woman, skimpily dressed, with a kerchief wound around her head, showed only a mask-like face.

Manuel took his jacket from his shoulder, threw it into a corner, and glancing sidelong at the table counted seven dishes lined up in two rows. This was one too many for his own family, since he ate standing.

"What is this?" he asked, with a gesture which his wife understood instantly. "The others, aren't they eating?"

"They will eat afterwards," Domitila replied dryly.

"Why?"

"Petra and I agreed to that. There are too many of us, and it will be more convenient to eat separately."

From the wall against which he was leaning, Martin let out a snort of suppressed ire and suspicion. Little by little the miller's children had arrived. They sat or stood, all of them silently looking at the ground as if the wear of the day's work had sealed their lips and forced them to droop their heads.

The miller approached the kitchen door which opened onto the vestibule and saw Leandro, Maria, and Irene on the porch. This desire to keep aloof, this evident hos-

tility, convinced Manuel that his brother was avoiding him.

Domitila had served supper, and at once Martin and his brother sat down to the table. The candle, suspended from the chimney by a wire, shed its wavering, red, dusky light over the youthful heads gathered in the middle of the dark smoky kitchen, suddenly reanimated by the joy of eating.

Santoyo grabbed a piece of meat and bread, and standing in front of the fire, began to eat. He was gnawed by the suspicion that his wife and Petra had come to blows, and this kindled his choler. Next to him, squatting on a stone which was often used as a stool, Domitila was preparing coffee. Driven by a desire to get to the bottom of the affair, the miller asked:

"Who started the idea that each family should eat separately?"

There was a silence. All the boys, from the oldest to the youngest, awaiting the answer of their mother, had turned their eyes towards her.

"Was it you or Petra?"

With a certain effort which did not escape Santoyo's fine perception, Domitila replied:

"Both of us."

"Agreed: both of you. But . . . one of you had to start the conversation; both of you could not have spoken at the same time—confound it! Why don't you explain yourself? Words don't cost money. . . ."

Avoiding the categorical reply demanded of her, Domitila murmured:

"I don't suppose they do. . . ."

"So it's you they talk about when they say: 'Two stitches through your lips and one through your bag,' aren't you?"

"That's it. . . ."

"Since when?"

"Well! . . . Always! . . . You know it well enough! 'A dull donkey tells his own story and his neighbour's, too.' You can't say that of me! . . . Let me alone. 'Who has a

mouth will make mistakes,' you know, and 'Silence is golden.' "

She was speaking in a low voice, and without looking at "the master," fearful that her eyes should reveal her thoughts.

Manuel Santoyo approached the table, grabbed from it a second piece of bread, put a fork into the pot for another piece of meat, and returned to the fire.

"Well, tell me, do you hear me?" he insisted.

Domitila shook with wrath.

"What do you expect me to tell you? If you need to know so badly, why don't you talk to your sister-in-law?"

He began to lose his temper; and, to remind his wife that peace was found in obedience, he threateningly touched her leg with the tip of his foot.

"You're the kind they mean when they say, 'In a closed mouth no fly enters.' . . . Well and good! . . . But now I've had enough of your old proverbs and you're going to talk."

He kicked her again harder than before.

"Will you talk?" he repeated. "Because if you don't . . . You know me! . . . I'll open your mouth with my hands and I'll take from it what I want! . . ."

Suiting the action to the word, he took hold of her by the neck; but the noise of a chair which fell violently to the floor arrested him and made him turn his head.

Martin had gotten up, rigid, slim, livid, all his muscles quivering, casting against the wall an elastic silhouette which reminded one of the miller twenty years ago.

"Don't you strike mother," he shouted imperiously. "It's not mother's fault!"

Santoyo let go of his wife, and his fleshless face, shaken by rapid nervous contortions, took on that sinister, yellowish, homicidal pallor which terrified his children.

Martin continued:

"Mother keeps quiet to avoid trouble. She's right. But it's

not necessary for her to speak. Have you lost your wits? You have the truth before your very eyes, and you can't see it!"

"Do you see it?"

"Of course I do! . . . Mother didn't tell me anything. But I'm certain that she didn't fall from the dovecot. That's an invention. What happened—and let God kill me on the spot if I don't really think so!—was that this morning, while you were in town, and my brothers and I were at work, Aunt Petra, Irene and Maria, who stayed behind loading manure, started trouble with mother, and between the three of them gave her a beating."

Domitila interrupted alarmed:

"Shut up, you devil! . . . You slanderer! . . . Shut up! Who put those crazy ideas into your head?"

He continued violently, still addressing his father:

"Don't you see it now clearly? . . . Otherwise why do the three of them hide now? . . . Aunt Petra burnt her hand and can't do anything? Well! But why didn't her daughters go to the fields today, as they always do? They have attacked mother! . . . Damn them! . . . They did! . . . Yes, they did! . . . and I'll slash them to pieces, and their father too, right now, if he gets in my way!"

Drunk and blind with fury, he took a knife from his belt and rushed towards the door. With a wide leap Manuel Santoyo closed his way in time.

"Quiet there!" he ordered.

The oldest brother looked so fierce, so crazed, that the others recoiled from him. Domitila herself, standing up now, did not dare approach him, or move at all. Her sad troubled face, her arms crossed in contrition over her breasts, made her look as if she were praying.

Before the erect figure of his father, who radiated courage and power, Martin had stopped paralysed. To prevent his cub from escaping by a sudden rush, the miller locked the door.

"Let me out, father . . . let me," begged Martin stammering; "I'll finish them right off! . . . I'll kill anyone who dares to touch mother, I'll kill him!"

"I am here to defend your mother," observed the miller coldly.

He stalked towards the enraged youth, and with one quick movement, snatched the knife from him, and threw it into a corner.

Martin gnashed his teeth. . . .

"Damn my soul!" he roared. "Curse the milk I sucked! . . ."

Incapable of rebelling against the authority of his father, which had always weighed on him, cruel and humiliating like a yoke, he bit his hands furiously and rained a shower of blows on his head. Without a word, Manuel Santoyo dealt him a terrible blow.

"Quiet! . . . What do you mean! . . . Steady there! . . ."

Martin warned him in a steady voice:

"Don't beat me, father! . . ."

"Are you threatening me?"

"I'm not threatening you . . . but . . . don't beat me, don't hit me again! . . ."

His race, in which the men had never shed a tear, peered out of his flashing and close-set eyes.

The miller answered with another blow. Martin did not reply or move; but his brothers protested with a low growl.

"That's not fair," muttered Matias; "if mother has been hurt, we ought to get even."

Monica added:

"We are too old to be treated that way! . . ."

Enraged, ready to beat them all, the miller turned against his protesting children.

"Who dares to speak? . . . I'll smash the head of the first one to wink! . . ."

No one replied, and they all looked at Domitila, who made signs to them to keep quiet. Santoyo continued abusing them,

like an animal-tamer who imposes himself on his beasts with a lash, and pushing and insulting them, drove them all towards a corner. Then he approached Martin challengingly:

"So . . . you are a man!"

The youth did not answer.

"Well, if you're really a man . . . why don't you kill me?"

He experienced a sadistic pleasure in affronting him, and three or four times more he battered his face with uncontrollable fury. Rigid, white, silent, his arms taut at his sides, his feet together, Martin remained stock-still. But for the blood which flowed abundantly from his nose, one would have thought that Manuel was striking a statue.

When he thought his son sufficiently humbled, the miller looked at all of his sons again, challenging them, and since they all dropped their eyes, without further word, he went towards his rooms. After a few minutes, Domitila, Martin, Matias, Monica, Macaria and Mateo, silently did the same.

No sooner were they gone than Leandro and Petra, who were watching for them to leave so that they could have their own supper, entered the kitchen, followed by their children. Agueda came in later. Petra and Maria quickly prepared a scant repast with which the family soon satisfied their hunger. The meal had the briefness of an evil omen. No one spoke, and from Leandro down, they all showed preoccupation and fear. The heavy steps of their relatives resounded on the floor above. They could hear them whisper to each other, cough, move chairs; and these noises, reminding them of the proximity of the enemy, seemed to suspend a threat over them and induced them to talk in low voices. They felt as though they were besieged.

Sitting next to Agueda, Maria helped her eat. The daughter of Don Lotario told them what she had seen from her room, through the crack in the door. In her face, even paler than ever, her large mystic eyes looked still frightened, and

the toneless words dropped from her dry lips like the monotonous buzzing of prayer.

Leandro, attentive to what the girl was saying, murmured to himself:

"We must leave this place."

Petra looked at him with an expression which was a mixture of dread and triumph.

"Are you convinced now?"

"Yes, I'm convinced now. Living under such conditions is impossible."

More than ever he realized the difficulty of his situation. His family and that of his brother had become definitely separated. Nothing in the future could reconcile them, and in these two inimical factions his, in which the women were in greater number, was the weakest. Barral was right! . . . Over the Santoyos hung an insane doom, a red predestination from which it was necessary to flee. Oppressed, the miller looked over at Maria, whom the youths of the village never approached—perhaps because they found her too pretty. Then he looked at Irene, who was now in her eighteenth year; and Domingo, who was almost a man already; Justo and Bienvenida, still so young. . . . Then he turned to Petra, in whose lap slept Pedro, the youngest of his children, and an indescribable, suffocating anguish suddenly melted his will. If he dragged himself from the mill, as he had thought of doing, what would become of them? But suddenly he thought that he as well as his wife could still work. He remembered the offer of money which Don Diosdado and Clara Luz had made him, thought that in America Irene and Maria would be able to make a good match, and once more a draught of new hope blew over his heart, and tinted his lips.

"I have decided!" he exclaimed. "As soon as winter is over we shall go away from here."

These words, which drew a sigh out of Petra, filled the

children with joy. For an instant their faces shone with unreflecting excitement.

"But when do we go, father?" Irene questioned.

"Towards April, when the fall begins in the Argentine."

"How wonderful! . . . But think of the months we have yet to wait!"

Agueda looked shyly towards the miller. Her desolate eyes seemed to ask: "And I?" . . . The prospect of returning to her father's house horrified her. She loved Leandro, who had never ill-treated her. She already considered herself his daughter; and feeling now that all had forgotten her, she realized that she meant nothing to them, and not being able to contain herself, she rested her head on her mutilated hand, and broke out into sobs.

Leandro Santoyo understood the pain which his carelessness had unwittingly caused, and he approached her deeply moved.

"Why are you crying?" he asked. "Are you crying because we are thinking of going away?"

Agueda bent her arm over her face, as if hiding behind it, and bowed her head. Maria watched her father sweetly. Touched, they all were silent. They seemed to be saying good-bye to Agueda, and swiftly, through the dark silent kitchen, ran the emotional flutter of leave-taking.

"You want to come with us, don't you?" the miller inquired.

Agueda did not answer. She sobbed and the shuddering of her hunched shoulders told of her anguish. With feigned brusqueness Leandro insisted.

"Do you want to come with us or don't you? Explain yourself!"

She replied between sobs:

"I don't want to be separated from you; take me away, even as a servant. Take me! . . . you are my only family. I'll die if you leave me behind! . . ."

Forgetting the whole load that already weighed him down, the kind-hearted man exclaimed:

"Well, don't cry any more! . . . You can come with us! Tomorrow I'll speak about it to your father."

He then looked at Petra, soliciting her acquiescence, but the large, clear eyes of his wife put him at ease, assuring him that he had acted well.

Much later, in the dead of night, tired of wrestling against sleeplessness, Manuel rose from the seed bags on which he had thrown himself to rest, and walking in his muffled sandals, went out onto the balcony. More powerful yet than the fatigue of his aching body were the preoccupations which kept his eyes wide open. There are days in which life glides by like cold honey, sluggishly, as if it did not want to move; and others in which it tumbles foamy and angry, like a torrent. These last twenty-four hours had shaken him with unusual violence.

The night was studded copiously with stars and filled with silence and matchless limpidity. There was no wind and under the full moon the immense plain, in bands of chestnut and grey, induced in Manuel an indefinable emotion. The smoke-coloured roads wound their way into the distance. The convent of the nuns was a white blur, and the height of the graveyard, on which the cypresses looked like a thick black brush-stroke, arched like the hump of a camel. The river gurgled its singsong as it pushed its way around the boulders and through the mill wheel, the water murmured in the channels, frogs croaked, and the moon, polishing the quiet surface of the pond, laid a shimmering ribbon of silver on the undulating backs of the hills.

Towards the south the town looked like an irregular muddy blot, in the midst of which shone two small lights well known to Manuel Santoyo. One of them indicated the house of the chemist, for his wife never slept in the dark;

and the weaker illuminated the little window where, for a long time, Paulina's mother, who had been paralytic for many years, was slowly dying. Those two sleepless lights had, in the night's darkness, a human expression and seemed to be looking at the mill.

Santoyo breathed with deep pleasure the acrid odour of cattle and of stables coming from the yards, and avidly searched the darkness before him.

"All of that is mine. . . ." he murmured.

Fortune of late had been leading him by the hand. Of the forty thousand reals which he had borrowed at interest he had already repaid Perez Cadenas about half, which had enabled him to ask the miser for twenty thousand more, with which he was able to defeat all comers in the last auction of meadows and woods held by the municipality. The profits which this victory brought him were considerable. The new pasture land he had acquired made it possible for him to increase his herds; and the wood he sold for a good price. To these fortunate deals was added the richness of the last two harvests of barley and wheat. The profit from these enabled him to acquire a few lots of beech trees and oaks near Stark Mound, where he was already beginning to build a large pig-sty from which he expected large returns within a short time. His business, therefore, was prosperous. He could not complain; to ask for more was to run the risk of turning Fortune against him.

After having enjoyed himself for a long time with these considerations he thought of his absent children, of Marta, already married, and soon to make him a grandfather, of Modesto and Marcos, who were in a boarding school in Soria for their high-school training. In the latter two he had placed his highest and proudest ambitions. He thought of them in prospect—eloquent, well dressed, in friendship with "the best set in Madrid," influential in politics, and perhaps participating in the government of the nation.

"Why not, if they inherited my blood?" he meditated with

pride. "The family is a sort of tree; they are the branches and I the trunk and the roots. When the roots sink deep and straight into the earth—like mine—the branches grow straight and very high."

For his uncultured spirit money represented the most fundamental need in life. He often repeated the saw: "Tell me how much you own and I'll tell you what you are worth." Glory, therefore, he considered as something spectacular, decorative, which, like the rich metal in an alloy, should be added to wealth to ennoble it. This was the aristocratic adornment with which Marcos and Modesto were expected to enhance the gold their father had taken out of the earth.

He did not care about Domitila, a juiceless fruit, exhausted by nine childbirths and ten miscarriages, some of them twins. She was useless, poor soil. The children, on the other hand, held his attention fast. He proposed to turn Martin and Matias, whom he had already got off from military duty, into two unrivalled farmers. . . . Ah! . . . Why not marry one of them to Alfonsa, the rich heir of Don Isidro? Then he thought of Monica and Macaria, who were two royal lasses; of Mateo, whom he would also save from military service; and of Matilde, still a child. . . .

Manuel Santoyo was now fifty-seven years old, and the very desire to leave his offspring well settled in life, made him heavy with the fear that he might not be able to be among them for at least "twelve more harvests," as he put it.

One can open a spring in any kind of ground, however dry or deep its crust. All that is necessary is to dig with faith, and the water will gush forth. And thus even with the hardest hearts. Santoyo's soul was like the soil of Castile. For long periods impermeable and sterile, but in everything to the advantage of his children arable and fertile; and not only because he loved them blindly, but also—and here his savage individualism blended with his paternal love—because they were "his own." In any case, his affection represented, perhaps, his only vulnerable point—the only crack

or fissure through which tenderness might effectively assail his will.

Children successfully separate from their parents, but parents do not from their children; the adage confirms this: "One father can love a hundred children, but not one child in a hundred loves his father." Parents and their children are like running water, whose waves flee from their source to follow those that flee them, in an indefinite series.

As he spun the thread of his thought, Manuel Santoyo remembered the fierce punishment he had just imposed upon his oldest son, and he said to himself that such punishment certainly hurt him more than it hurt the victim. However, he did not regret what he had done: he was like that kind of wood which, when buried under the ground, becomes petrified before it rots or yields. The frequency with which he flogged his children was due to his paternal love, he thought. Since everything that he owned was for them, he argued with himself, they should be humble, courageous, faithful in their tasks and capable of bearing up under hardships. But if a stranger should try to harm their interests, or offend them in the smallest way—he would drink the blood of anyone who tried it.

These thoughts led him naturally to Leandro. Secretive and a persistent hoarder of his thoughts perhaps even more than of his money, Manuel never felt the need of opening his heart to anyone. He was fond of saying to himself: "If the person you confide in does not understand you, you gain nothing through the confidence. And if, understanding your plans, he should play you false or put obstacles in the way of your ambitions, you are the loser." Both shy and despotic, he liked to surround himself with "inferiors," not with "equals." That was one of the reasons why Leandro's company was never pleasant to him. Intelligent, and for that reason not amenable to domination, open-handed, improvident and loaded with a family, his brother rose before him as a very difficult obstacle and in every such obstruction there is

an implied threat. Why did he admit him beneath his own roof? . . . And, what was much more illogical, why, if his brother was harming his interests, did he not throw him out? . . .

The figure of Leandro broke into his consciousness with such force that from that moment the miller could think only of him. Like a claw, it tore at his thoughts, wounded him, frustrated him.

"If my brother were to die," he thought, "his wife and children would have to go away, and I would be the only owner, the unhindered master of all this."

Ideas are like invading ivy, which once planted, without the need of extraneous help, grows, branches off, and stretches its tendrils over everything about it. The impulse to kill his brother which once, long ago, had crept stealthily into his soul, had gained gradually in such a way that when the miller came upon it once more the murderous intention had already taken hold of his heart. For this reason the execrable idea did not intimidate him. And yet, in spite of his designs, he did not include himself in the "third underground level" of which Victor Hugo speaks. Though he might kill and plunder, he could not consider himself either a murderer or a thief. He was an agonist, a struggler. He was the prototype of the beast of prey who, moved by love of its offspring, will crush everything that threatens them. When did any man who was a genuine success ever crown his work without a little blood? He remembered "Mil Reales," whom, in one instant, he had forced to bite the dust, almost without risk.

"It's so easy to kill a man!" he said to himself.

The memory of "Mil Reales," the lone wolf, determined him not to implicate anyone else in the killing of his brother. "Don't trust, don't wrangle, and don't join a brotherhood," reads the maxim. Had he been a highwayman, he would not have had need of helpers; an affair that is known by more than one person does not take long to become public prop-

erty, and therefore only he who commits such forbidden acts should know of them.

Since the imagination moves spasmodically in its free hours, the image of Agueda rose suddenly to his mind, shaking his nerves with a feverish and intense desire. He felt her breath in his, and his fingers gripped her youthful, scantily clad form. He gritted his teeth.

"She's a fine girl," he sighed lustfully.

The hours went by; the moon was nearing the horizon, but the miller remained there, with both hands on the railing of the balcony, insensible to the dew that chilled his shoulders. The resolution to get rid of his brother still dominated his will, and he thought it more feasible each instant. He even came to think his action just. If he should resolve to carry it out, it would not be greed which moved him but self-defence. By allowing Leandro to live on him, he let the younger man deprive him of half of what was his own. Rob him, in fact. And he would only be defending himself by killing his burdensome brother. When one proceeds in this manner, to kill is to exercise a right.

He raised his head and looked towards the north, in the direction in which his passionate ambitions were directed. Was it fair that half of all that land, acquired at the cost of so much anxiety and work, should later come to be the property of his nephews?

Under the light of the stars the old tower crowned the Mount of Fatigue like a warlike pennant, and its stark contour jutted out like the lone fratricidal idea which topped Santoyo's spirit. The soul of the miller wore that red purpose like a gallant crest.

The death of Leandro had to be planned so that it would appear as a chance event and not as a crime. But how could he manage this? . . . Upon the occasion and the place he would select depended the success of his daring enterprise. Would he find a propitious opportunity during the gathering of the grape, which would soon begin? The waters which

rumbled under the mill led him to think that perhaps in the wooded margins of the Guadalsazar there could be found a favourable and unfrequented spot, and while he reflected, his eyes fell unconsciously on the pond, whose quiet, steel-coloured crystal surface had the oblong shape of an axe-head.

This image brought to his mind the thought of such weapons as kill in silence. But he soon rejected it, because behind a knife-thrust there must always be found an aggressor, while there are deaths from bullets which, on account of the position of the wound, seem to have been self-inflicted.

Submerged in these dark coils he continued for a long time, his elbows on the railing, his face in his hands, without feeling cold, fatigue, or the need of sleep. That night was for him the axis on which his destiny was to turn. From far off, from the infinite dark depth of the horizon, the only two lights of the town—that of the Barrals' bedroom and that which illuminated the garret room of Paulina—were like two eyes, awake and accusing.

He suddenly came to himself and realized with surprise that it was already dawn. A faint silvery rose tinted the depth of the sky. The stars were paling, and suddenly, in the silence of the deep and transparent light of the new morning, vibrated the shattering cry of a partridge. Instantaneously, with the speed of sorcery, the distant lines of the landscape emerged from the shadows. The cocks awakened and throughout the whole green plain resounded the noise of their crowing. Then, almost at once, the bells of the church and of the convent began to peal, calling to early mass.

Stiffened by the cold and the night dew, Manuel Santoyo left the balcony. What should he do? He had a very reasonable desire to sleep but his eagerness to work, which never relaxed, did not allow him to yield. Idleness was irritating to him.

"It's Friday," he thought, "and tomorrow all the work of manuring and harrowing should be finished."

He yawned, stretched his strong arms, and rubbed his eyes as if he were trying to take them out or plunge them into his skull. Suddenly he muttered an oath. Though he was devout he did not believe that the saints should be honoured by allowing their worshippers to rest.

"By Saint Eulogio," he mumbled. "I had forgotten that tomorrow is a holiday."

IX

TWO days before Saint Eulogio's day, falling that year on a Saturday, the town began to buzz with unusual animation.

On Friday a group of youths began to build the ring where two young bulls would be fought on Sunday afternoon. The longest axis of the construction—composed of boards and posts stored from year to year by the municipality in its cellars—occupied the greater part of the shapeless perimeter of the old forum, from the façade of the town hall to the porticoes. But as the pieces were numbered, it was easy to assemble them, and the work advanced rapidly.

The merry tapping of the hammers was echoed by the cheerful bustle of the merchants, who, with the first light of dawn, gradually arrived from different points throughout the region, and hurriedly unloaded their goods, which later they exhibited on the ground, on carpets stretched alongside of the porticoes. The number of stalls augmented by the hour: earthern pots and jars, toys, sweets, multi-coloured glazed crockery—a large variety of objects was offered for sale. On the counters hurriedly improvised out of boxes, were piled handkerchiefs, tams, socks, stockings, and stridently printed percales. This colourful confusion spread over the black ground of the marketplace the smiling polychrome riot of a garden.

The news that the municipal body of Carrascal del Horcajo would not charge taxes this year either for the cattle

stalls or cattle which would be brought to the fair, spread quickly from town to town. This attracted a good number of strangers and traders, and made the cattle show the principal number in the Programme of Festivities which "Don Profundo" had drawn up. The town became youthful with renewed joy: in the crooked alleys and streets there were more people than usual, many of the inhabitants whitewashed their houses, and Don Bernardo, the mayor, expecting an increase in trade, decided to repaint the two horseshoes which decorated the entrance to his shop. Doña Gerarda and her daughter, confused by so much novelty, did not leave their observatory even to eat. The endless procession of people, many of them of their acquaintance, which filed towards the square, excited them nervously, and left them sated and fatigued.

Towards mid-morning on Friday a woman and two men arrived at Paulina's Inn. The woman rode a young ass, and the men came on foot, and although they were badly dressed and their garments were dirty from the dust of the roads, their manners and speech revealed distinction. Paulina asked them what they wanted, and when they asked for rooms her face clouded a little.

"You came too late," she said; "last night I hired out all the rooms I had left."

"You needn't worry," answered the man who had spoken first; "we are actors, and taking advantage of the fair, we wish to organize a little show here to patch up our finances, and continue our trip to Soria, where we are heading; we could give it in the café—we know about its size already. As regards the stage, you needn't worry; we can make one in no time with a curtain which we carry with us, and half a dozen boards which we will find about somewhere. You don't need to bother either about a bed for my brother-in-law and me; we are used to the ups and downs of life, and it doesn't matter how we spend one or two nights. The only one of us who needs rest is my wife, and I have no doubt

that you, in the kindness of your heart, will find a bed for her, no matter how humble."

The woman referred to, still young and infinitely captivating, looked pleadingly at Paulina, and over her face, beautiful in spite of its extreme paleness and her exhaustion, flickered a smile. She was mounted sideways, woman-fashion, and her large girth and the laxity of her posture indicated her condition.

Moved by the thought of the ordeal awaiting the woman, but without relaxing the sullen wrinkles on her brow, the innkeeper answered:

"Oh . . . you are married! . . ."

"About two years already."

"La Repetia" made no gesture. Her sly eyes seemed to search their faces for a lie. After a few seconds of indecision, she added impertinently:

"You can prove that you are married, can't you?"

"Of course we can."

"Otherwise I couldn't admit you to my house, because here . . . in this town . . . Well, you know how it is! . . . Everything is criticized, you know."

Humbly, with the diffident composure of those long accustomed to every kind of offensive questioning, the actor showed her some papers. He was a man about thirty-five years of age, amiable, of good appearance, on whose slightly stooping shoulders a life too hard for him had begun to weigh. His grave voice had a musical quality which was sad and convincing.

"You can read this," he said; "this is our marriage certificate, obtained in Ciudad Real. . . . Look. . . . Church of Saint Mary. . . . Aurora Dominguez, legitimate daughter of . . . etc.; that is my wife; and I, Nemesio Valentin, also legitimate son, born in Burgillos, province of Toledo. If you care to take the trouble you can read it! . . . Everything is as it should be."

As though sorry to have shown too much distrust, Paulina cut him short:

"It isn't necessary!"

"Please, I beg of you."

"It isn't necessary, I say," insisted "La Repetia." "I understand now the kind of people you are."

The actor bowed gracefully.

"Thank you very much. As for this gentleman here, as I have already told you, he is my brother-in-law, Teodoro Dominguez, comic actor and famous juggler."

During this dialogue the actress had slid gently from her mount, and approaching the innkeeper, she put an arm around her waist with a winning gesture of friendship, and asked for a glass of water.

"For the love of God," she whispered, "I am dying of nausea."

Moved by the woman's discomfort, which reminded her of her own months of pregnancy, Paulina took her by the hand and, followed by the two men, entered the café, leaving their donkey and baggage at the door.

While they breakfasted they offered further explanations.

"The lady," said the innkeeper, whom the actress had in a few moments succeeded in winning over, "will sleep in my room, and even in my bed, if necessary. But I don't know where I can put you two. I can't think of a place. We shall have to see about that! In the kitchen, perhaps, or maybe in the hay loft. . . . And about that act you are thinking of, I don't know what to tell you. The place is small, as you can see for yourselves; I don't think it's fit for a show. And as for the public, I don't believe it will come while there is a dance going on in the square. Here we don't care much for the theatre, and the lasses as well as the men, all they want to do is to dance, and the darker it is the better they like it. That's a fact! . . . In any case, you should speak to Don Diosdado Barral, the pharmacist, who lives

very near here on the same street; he'll be able to tell you what you should do better than anyone else."

Following the advice of the innkeeper, Nemesio and Teodoro went forth in search of the chemist, who had already left his house, and after a difficult pursuit they managed to find him in Lucas's barber shop, at whose door more than eight men were waiting to be shaved. They had no need to inquire for him because Don Diosdado, guessing as soon as he spied them that they wanted to speak to him and the kind of men they were, came out to meet them. Excited by the cheery rumble of steps and voices which filled the porticoes, he felt in very good spirits, and not even by mistake did he stand on his maimed leg. With a few sincere words, Nemesio and Teodoro told him what had brought them to him, craftily hinting also in what straits they found themselves. Barral promised to help them in any way he could. He asked them what rôles they preferred to play, and was very pleased to hear that they specialized in comedy, though limiting themselves to those which were written for three persons only.

In Nemesio Valentin, with his deep voice and his good figure, he recognized the "gallant"; and in Teodoro Dominguez, who was restless, smiling, and less sturdy than his brother-in-law he recognized the stock "comedian." Both seemed satisfied with their fate, as if their threadbare garments, their gnawed boots, and their old hats, soiled at the band with perspiration, did not cause them any discomfort at all. How conceive of the roads of defeat through which these men had plodded before arriving at this place? . . . Unhappy strolling farceurs of the open road, who, with their bundle of illusions on their shoulders, go from town to town spreading a little beauty about them—what will become of them, when on some hungry day, on the far-flung ribbon of a roadway, life suddenly bids them farewell? Stirred by these considerations Don Diosdado, in whom that old love for the stage that had shed light on the years of

his youth still persisted, observed them fondly and even enviously.

"And freedom," he thought. "Is not freedom worth more than our daily bread?"

"Señora Paulina," said Valentin, "foretells a failure. She believes that no one will come to see us, because the people here are more interested in dancing than in the theatre."

Standing stiffly on the leg which served him as a sound foundation for his optimism, the chemist shrugged his shoulders.

"What does she know?" he exclaimed. "If you charge no more than twenty centimos, or a real, you'll fill the hall."

"She also spoke about the small size of her place."

"It isn't very big, it's true; but I believe that we can put as many as two hundred chairs in it and in the doorways about forty to fifty more spectators can stand."

"Two hundred chairs," repeated Dominguez. "Do you believe we can find that many?"

"Of course we can," interrupted Barral. "Each neighbour will send whatever he has in his house, and that's that."

They were speaking about this when Hernandez Halcon appeared. Diosdado introduced him.

"I had already heard from Paco Camacho," said Don Blas, "that some actors had arrived in town. . . ."

Nemesio Valentin and Teodoro answered with an assenting gesture:

"We are the actors," they said.

Hard, small, badly shaved, with his round, atrabilious face and his truculent voice, the doctor impressed them as a disagreeable person.

"These gentlemen," explained the chemist, "propose to give a play tomorrow, Saturday. . . ."

Don Blas muttered an oath.

"The same as if they gave it Sunday or Monday!"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean they'll not make a penny from it. . . . Isn't that plain enough?"

His cutting accent, which forestalled an answer, his raised shoulders, his bent figure, and the insolence with which he swayed on his short legs, justly irritated Barral.

"Why do you say that? I'll begin to believe that you have as much brains as Paulina."

"I tell you so," replied Don Blas, "because I know the illiteracy of my fellow townsmen. When people don't know how to read, how can you expect them to attend the theatre? . . . Don't ever expect it! You see it differently because when you got up today, the first leg you stood on was the whole one. That's all! . . . And if I spoke differently I would only be dreaming or wanting to deceive these worthy men."

He nodded to the actors and turned on his heel as if to walk away, but turning back, he added, speaking to Valentin:

"Tomorrow is Saturday and they'll dance in the square from five in the afternoon till eleven at night, and the dance costs no money. Besides, while the dance lasts, the taverns are not closed. Mark my words! . . . Sunday we'll have a bullfight, and immediately after the fight the dance will be continued until the last of the dancers falls on the ground either from exhaustion or from drunkenness. What are you going to do then? Nothing, of course! Just remember what I say; even if you were the greatest actors in Spain, you would not make a penny from your performance!"

The idlers who walked about the porticoes had made a steadily increasing circle around the group. This annoyed Barral, who thought that the doctor's statements might create an adverse attitude towards the actors. To cut the vexing dialogue short, he said:

"Each man reasons, my friend, according to the brains God gave him, and in the present case you do it about the way Paulina would. Let it be so, then! . . . But I, who

according to you got up today on my healthy leg, I assure you—and I am ready to bet anything you want on this—that tomorrow, dance or no dance, and rain or shine, these gentlemen—who have been my friends since they came looking for me a short time ago—will perform before a full house."

With a boastful gesture, very typical of him, he pulled his vest down and, as he straightened his whole body, added petulantly:

"You can't see life from my height, Don Blas, because you were born with legs too short for that. . . . You may know, or think you know, your fellow townsmen. . . . But you don't know me, and when it finds itself challenged, Carrascal del Horcajo is like me."

Having made this declaration he turned his back on him, and stepping between Valentin and Dominguez, took them familiarly by the arm:

"Let's go," he said in a low voice. "We'll talk to Paulina. She's a good-hearted woman, and since she owes me a few favours she'll do what I ask her to."

With long strides, and a limp in which the jerky jogging up and down parodied the movement of a piston in a steam engine, he broke his way through the curious crowd who respectfully stood aside to let him pass.

Won over by his cordiality, the two actors clung close to him, like two pilgrims who, fleeing from the storm, seek shelter under the long branches of a tree, and their gratitude burst out in protestations of friendship and admiration.

"You have nothing to be grateful for, since here, as you see me, and in spite of my unfortunate appearance, I am much less a chemist than an actor. I am one of your kind; had I had my way in life, I would have been one of you. The misfortune of becoming lame when I was a boy prevented it. It forced me to become a pharmacist. But my true muse has never been that of Chemistry, but that of the Theatre. The Theatre! . . . I don't know what lovely

magic is contained in the syllables of that short word, but it makes my heart happy, and I taste it as if it were a sweet! . . . You can be sure therefore that the interest I have shown you is for my own pleasure. You can command me as a brother."

The faded beauty of Aurora Dominguez, the melancholy of a defeated artist accustomed to resignation which enveloped her, and above all the plight of her pregnancy, interested Don Diosdado extremely. The orders he gave "La Repetia" were therefore emphatic and definite.

"It is necessary," he declared, "that these people carry away at least a fair impression of our town, and that depends entirely upon you. You have to give them a room. I know what you are going to tell me: they are all taken. I don't care a hang about that! Even if you have to throw people out into the street, you must supply them with a decent room. And if you can't, or don't want to please me, I'll have to take them to my house."

"All right, Don Diosdado," replied the innkeeper, "I'll do what you ask. But you don't have to be so over-bearing when you talk to me. You know that it's not only my business but my pleasure to serve and please everybody."

The chemist expressed his gratitude in jovial words. He was getting ready to go when Nemesio Valentin spoke to him of the small platform which they had to fit up as a stage.

"I'll speak to Don Bernardo about that immediately; he's not only the smith and the mayor, but the carpenter as well," answered Barral. "You needn't worry about that, and if you feel like it, you should lie down to rest for a few minutes. I'll take charge of the stage, of getting the chairs that are needed, and of bringing people to the performance. I'm doing it not only out of sympathy for yourselves, but because I have taken it into my head to disappoint Don Blas."

At once formal and effusive, he bade Aurora good-bye.

"My wife," he told her, "will call on you. She's a charming little old lady. You wouldn't believe she belonged in this place. You'll become friends immediately."

Tall, fat, ruddy, and genial, Don Diosdado radiated confidence and cheerful humour, and gave the strangers a feeling of well-being.

Teodoro Dominguez escorted him to the porticoes.

"At the end of the play," he explained, "I usually perform a few juggling tricks, and I must ask you for still another favour."

"Very well, what can I do for you?"

"I hesitate to ask you, but since I don't know anyone else . . ."

"You know me, that's enough; what do you need, tell me?"

"I was thinking of raffling a watch. . . ."

The chemist did not allow him to finish.

"And you need an accomplice. You want me to win the watch so as not to lose it."

Dominguez burst out laughing.

"Of course, man, of course!" exclaimed Barral; "you may count on my collaboration; together we shall swindle the whole stupid mob. But . . . haven't I told you already that I am your brother?"

Through the course of the afternoon the arrival of the visitors to the fair continued on the increase. Through all the roads that led to the town came large herds of cattle, horses, sheep, droves of animals loaded with merchandise, and men and women on foot or in carts.

In the hardware store and in numerous places improvised under the porticoes the sale of ash sticks, with which the young men, according to custom, were to beat the bulls the day of the fight, had already begun. The public was excited. Old and young spoke of the two bullocks that would be fought. Many of the townspeople went to look them over where the keepers had them pasturing, about three miles

from Carrascal del Horcajo. Each formed his own opinion. While some optimistically held that they weighed fully six or seven hundred pounds each, the pessimists declared angrily that they weighed no more than four or five hundred. They also talked of the four fighters who were coming from Soria Sunday morning; and of the actors who were staying at Paulina's and who were Barral's friends.

"I've seen them," said the best informed ones, giving themselves airs; "two men and a woman, and if her waist means anything, she's with child."

The inn, crowded as it had never been before with carriers, common farmhands, merchants, traders, farmers, and cattlemen, shared the hectic gaiety of the square. Here was a coarse crowd of sunburnt faces, out of which teeth shone sensual and white. The men wore berets and wide-brimmed felt hats, and went about in their shirt-sleeves.

The clientele was so numerous that, shortly before nine o'clock, when the actors entered the café, after they had had their dinner, Barral had to give up his table to them, to let them sit down.

"You ought to stay here with the mayor," he told them; "he's a very good friend of mine. Tell him where you want your stage built, and how. I'm going to sit with the doctor and his friends; I want to put him in a rage."

In spite of the large gathering the noise was not great. The few who spoke did so in low voices, as if ashamed. The others assumed a contemplative attitude. Unconsciously the presence of Aurora, dressed like a lady, preoccupied and repressed them. Never had one of the ladies of Carrascal del Horcajo, either married or single, set foot inside the café. The stranger was therefore the first woman they had seen drinking coffee "like a man," and this novelty kindled in them an unbridled curiosity. From the table of "the cypresses," at which Perez Cadenas, "Don Profundo," Don Cirilo, Celedonio Rionda, and the corporal of the Civil Guard, paid homage to the god Silence; from that which

Barral called "the table of the intermittent ones," which was the most crowded one tonight; and from the kitchen, where the drivers and farmhands were gathered—from all over the room, all the faces were turned towards the actress. They all spied on her in silence; they examined her shoes, her dress, her gestures, her smile, her speech. One noticed that she wore no rings; another thought, "She's pretty, but the years are beginning to tell on her." Another one, "They say she's married . . . but how are you to know? . . ." At intervals there were confused whisperings:

"Do you like her?"

"Not much . . ."

"They perform tomorrow, I heard . . ."

"What do I care . . . I'm going to the square to dance."

"Of course, so am I."

The dialogue stopped and their eyes turned once more to the woman, avidly seeking to discover something new about her, happy to see what they had not noticed before.

After exchanging a few words with the priest, and chatting a little with Don Lotario, who had come in at that moment, Paco Camacho approached his brother-in-law.

"Hello . . . What's new? . . . I've already heard that you spent the whole afternoon with the actors."

Barral did not answer him. He was fond of the simple inventor of the "reflector-matches" and "dish-tipper" in a brotherly way, but could not take him very seriously. His meagre figure, his yellow complexion, his half-open mouth, the incoherence of his ideas, and even the very enthusiasm with which he amused himself in his leisure hours by stuffing birds, placed him almost beyond the pale of normal life.

Camacho continued:

"She isn't ugly, is she? . . . Slightly autumnal, perhaps . . . no? . . . but, well . . . but perhaps you know better than I. . . ."

Don Diosdado kept silent, his eyes fixed on the smoky roof beams, as if the words weren't addressed to him.

As soon as he had sat down between Leandro Santoyo and Graciano Garcia, who made way for him, Camacho added, addressing himself in a confidential tone to his brother-in-law and to Hernandez Halcon in turn:

"Everybody is talking about the actors; and about her especially. The first impression that the woman made upon me—I'll be frank with you—was disagreeable. 'She must be a loose one,' I thought, 'to go about these places like that.'"

Don Blas looked at the inventor with contemptuous venom, and his lips flowered into a caustic phrase:

"Do you call that 'thinking'?"

Paco Camacho answered candidly:

"On my word of honour, I took her for an adventuress. . . . But I must admit I made a mistake . . . she really is a married woman . . . do you understand?"

Barral scowled at the indiscreet fellow; the patience, the extraordinary resignation with which he was listening to him had all been spent.

"But do you think, you long-eared jackass," he exclaimed, "that those idiotic imbecilities with which you have tortured us since you arrived are of any interest to us? . . . Don't you understand, you consummate ostrich, that neither Don Blas, nor Leandro, nor Don Graciano, nor I, who are free spirits, are interested in whether that lady is or is not married with benefit of clergy?"

The inventor of the "dish-tipper," astonished that his words should have merited such a harsh rebuke, replied:

"The more fool you. What evil is there in my words? . . . That woman is married, I'm sure of it. Paulina told me herself, do you understand, and she saw their certificate."

He could not continue because Don Diosdado made the cups and the coffee spoons ring on the table with a furious blow and broke out sharply:

"Enough," he shouted, "enough! . . . You can spurt those stupid babblings to 'the cypresses,' or the corporal of

the Guard. . . . I don't want to hear them. . . . Whether legitimately married or not, these people deserve all our esteem. They're artists, and that's enough. Because artists, even if they are as unhappy as these, live altogether above 'certificates of good conduct' written out by any number of police sergeants in the world!"

The poor browbeaten man, not daring to reply, drooped his head, and a little later, muttering an excuse, went over to Don Isidro's table, where they were also talking of the actors. Shortly afterwards the appearance of Manuel Santoyo, who crossed the room towards the kitchen, changed the conversation of "the cypresses." His picturesque figure and springy step had an expressive strength which attracted attention.

"How well he keeps himself," exclaimed Perez Cadenas; "every day he looks more erect. It's a pleasure to see him!"

"He must be over fifty-seven," said the priest.

"We are about the same age, more or less," added "Don Profundo," uttering a deep sigh, "and see how old I look next to him. . . . I guess it's not physical labour, but a sedentary life, that wears us down! . . . Moral suffering is also very exhausting."

Full of rancour towards his brother-in-law, Rionda exclaimed:

"Do you think that Manuel has no worries? . . . I should say he has! I may be poor, but I wouldn't like to be in his boots . . . The way that man suffers! God only knows! And of course he deserves it. He has a hell in his house."

They spoke of Domitila's bruises, of the uncertain origin of Petra's burn, of the cut which left Agueda almost entirely without fingers, and of the antagonism, growing daily deeper, which separated the two brothers.

"Anyone would say," exclaimed Don Cirilo, "that the mill of the Santoyos was bewitched. I wonder if its founder,

José Hipolito Ramirez, left an unsettled account with the devil?"

Perez Cadenas, happy in the certainty that the miller, who still owed him a considerable sum, enjoyed unusually good health, answered with satisfaction:

"In any case Manuel Santoyo is good for many years yet."

The conversation was interrupted by Paulina, who was selling tickets for a raffle. The enterprising innkeeper was raffling two chickens; the tickets cost two reals, and the drawing would take place at ten thirty. To induce her customers to try their luck, she invited them to feel with their own hands the fat and heavy weight of the fowl, which she had tied by the legs.

With the reluctance of one performing a painful act, Don Isidro bought one ticket and "Don Profundo" another. The priest took two.

When "La Repetia" visited the doctor's group, Don Diosdado, always exuberant, bought twelve tickets.

"If I win," he exclaimed, addressing himself in a loud voice to the actors, "I'll give you the prize!"

Near him, Don Blas whispered in his ear:

"A very good idea . . . I congratulate you! I'm sure that those poor unfortunate people will be grateful to you for that. They're quite down and out, you know. It doesn't surprise me! . . . What a country this is!"

He stopped to think for a brief moment and continued, faithful to his anti-clerical bias:

"Spain is the nation which, in proportion to the number of its inhabitants, consumes less meat and more bread than any other country. And we feed thus badly on account of our pernicious Catholic education. We interpret 'Our Father' literally, and end up by thinking that bread is something sacred, and by making of the bakers the administrators of the celestial pantry. We pray in a mechanical way, with our lips, without knowing what we ask for. We teach our

children not to 'throw away God's bread,' and to kiss superstitiously the crumb that falls to the ground. And on the contrary, if what falls from the dish happens to be a nice piece of loin, we remain unmoved. Pretty logic, don't you think? . . . Through our centuries of piety we have unconsciously acquired the psychology of beggars. We like to suffer, to be downcast, to gaze at the ground. . . . This is the reason for our sobriety. 'It is necessary to punish the body,' we are told, and we fast. The truth is that if fasting purifies, we can enter Paradise free of charge. Oh! What weakness, what melancholy, what creeping sluggishness preys upon this our aged and monastic Spain, where our women feel they are only authorized to eat chicken when they are ill! . . ."

The conversation, in which Leandro Santoyo and Don Graciano dared not take part, because they found it all too high-flown and difficult, drifted once more towards the subject of the environment of small towns, against which the chemist as well as the doctor—the latter seriously, the former jestingly—never tired of inveighing. The mixture of curiosity and contempt with which the public looked at the actors, especially at the woman, particularly engaged the attention of the critics. The profound and subconscious mysticism of the uncouth crowd, shy and sensual, had the same lack of esteem for women as did Saint Paul. Among so many faces, whose deep bronze did not cool the dark, warm flames of their eyes, the pallor of the stranger seemed even greater. Her beauty did not triumph, however, amid the untamed masculinity of that crowd, in whom gradually contempt prevailed over desire.

Observing these individuals with their badly shaven beards, their narrow foreheads, their little shrewd, prying eyes, and their knotted, nervous hands, Barral remembered the wonderful portrait of San Juan de Avila by El Greco, in which the artist, with incomparable skill, painted the Castilian character—just as vulgar and opaque externally as it

is ardent and full of vivid light within. The chemist elaborated this idea into a figure in which the *vargueño*, that chest peculiar to Spain, full of drawers and secret places, all of which close and disappear at once behind a single door, was the symbol of that close-sealed Spanish temperament in which the Gothic, Roman, Carthaginian, Arab, and Jewish traits have left such variegated and discordant shades.

"Our people," said the chemist, "will never manage to take full part in universal progress until they scrape off that rind of insensibility."

"And until they learn to take a bath daily," interrupted Don Blas, "because a people is not susceptible to advance as long as it believes in the quackeries of saints more than in us scientists, and as long as its men think they are being manly when they boast, as ours do, of having about them 'the smell of dogs, horses and gun-powder.'"

"We need to soap and soak the soul more than the body," replied Don Diosdado. "The greatest national defect is analgesia—lack of sensitiveness. When I was a student I was once told that a certain Spanish artist, who had returned from foreign travel and who was greatly influenced by Italian art, received a commission for a Lady of Sorrow for a church of I don't remember what little town in Castile. Having a good deal of inspiration and very little money, the artist began the work immediately, and a few months later finished a statue in which the agonized twist of the colourless lips, the supreme affliction of the half-closed eyes, the thick tears which ran down the cheeks in torrents, the whole intense pain, in a word, which altered the divine figure, was no less expressive than the seven daggers sunk in her heart. Then, very satisfied with himself, the sculptor wrote the mayor of the town, telling him of the success with which he had completed his work, and asking him to send for it when he liked. After a few days he received in his atelier a visit from the mayor, the priest, the secretary of the Council and a few other genuine Castilians. With sur-

prise and indignation the artist realized that the image did not produce in them the admiration which he had expected. The visitors, after contemplating it for a long time, began to say: 'Very good . . . very good,' but without much fervour. And then they would ask each other: 'Don't you think it is very good?' . . . Behind these praises the artist sensed a great disappointment. Worried and hurt, he asked them: 'Don't you like it then?' . . . They answered politely, 'Why, of course we do.' . . . 'Very seldom,' the artist continued, 'have I worked with such enthusiasm. Notice the curve of her mouth, tired with sobbing; the tragic despair of those eyes, the mute anguish of that forehead, the powerful realism of that weeping. . . . What do you think? I want you to be frank. Please let me have your opinion.' . . . The vistors remained silent, nodding their heads as if they had nothing to say or could not tell what they were thinking about. 'I believe,' the artist continued, 'that it's impossible to express better the anguish of a mother who has seen her son die in torture. What do you think?' He continued praising his work until one of the rustics cut him short with these deep and revealing words, a phrase which expresses the quintessence of the race: 'It may be as you say,' said the man, 'but I maintain—and that is the reason why your Lady of Sorrow doesn't convince me—that in Castile we don't weep that way.' That man was right! . . . Castile does not understand emotional grimaces. The sculptor discreetly accepted the lesson, and sure now of pleasing, proceeded to straighten the lips of the image, to wipe the tears from the eyes, to quiet the knitted brow . . . and in this way concentrated in the immobility of the face the awful, fierce immobility of our Castile that weeps inwardly when it weeps at all."

Barral concluded:

"We are all too reserved. We are ashamed of laughing and of crying, and the pride that we exert in throttling our feelings does harm to our public life. Therefore I say that

what we need most is to lose the sad and very Spanish habit of not talking."

Don Blas made a gesture:

"Don't we talk, though?"

"I say we don't," replied the pharmacist. "We certainly don't deserve the reputation of being windbags. To speak, careful not to mention anything that's in the heart, is to say nothing, is merely to make noise."

For a second time Paco Camacho, who could not keep quiet for very long, came back to his brother-in-law. Bending down, he whispered mysteriously in his ear:

"Have you quarrelled with Don Isidro?"

"Thank Heaven, yes! We haven't spoken to each other since the night that I burnt his cloak."

"I'm sorry . . . because . . . well, I want you to understand me . . . I had thought of selling him a ticket, see?"

"Yes?"

"But if you're angry with each other, I prefer to go to 'Don Profundo.' "

"Do as you like. It's all the same to me. But better consider, however, that you'll have to choose between shouting yourself to death, if you approach him through his left ear, or looking at his hanging under-chin, if you do it from the right."

Insensitive to the earthy humour of his brother-in-law, the inventor continued rather gravely:

"I do it with a desire to help the actors, do you understand?"

"Of course!"

"I'm doing it out of altruism."

"My congratulations then! Altruism is the seed of our most noble actions!"

With a heaviness that distinguishes dull people, Camacho tried to make himself clear:

"I hope you realize that I'm not making anything out of this business."

"Of course I do! In a small town a ticket agent couldn't make any money!"

"If I'm doing it, it's only because I like to be of service. Do you see what I mean? . . . Because I have a good heart, because I was born that way! . . . Do you understand me now?"

The stupid reiterations and simplicities of the inventor exasperated Barral, and he lost his self-control.

"Shut up!" he exclaimed, "shut up, or else get out of here!"

"What makes you angry so suddenly?"

"I just can't stand you, that's why! . . . Your vulgar and ugly habit of constantly interrupting yourself every eight or ten words to ask: 'do you see?' . . . or 'do you understand?' . . . or 'see what I mean?' . . . that habit shows how narrow your mind is. Only people that don't know what they're talking about are afraid of not making themselves understood. If you want to, go to 'Don Profundo'; and if you like it, kiss his under-chin for him. . . . But in any case get out of my sight! . . ."

Camacho left, shamed and humbled, and Don Diosdado added, addressing himself to the doctor:

"What do you think? . . . Am I right or not? . . . I think half of Spain's backwardness is due to the time we spend asking ourselves idle questions; dirtying our lips with foul expletives, and leaving for tomorrow what, without much trouble, we might have done today. . . ."

In agreement sometimes, sometimes arguing, the evening went by, and at ten thirty, according to Paulina's announcement, the raffling of the chickens took place. Paco Camacho was the winner. The public began to applaud, and the lucky man looked about him, touched, greeting everybody.

The chemist pretended comic indignation:

"How stupid Fortune is! . . . It gives those two beautiful fowl to my brother-in-law! And he's going to stuff them!"

Little by little the clients of the café went away, and an observer would have been interested to notice that all of them, without being aware of it, repeated the same movements and gestures. Before breaking up the groups, the members of each table looked at each other, as if coming to an agreement, and then, almost at once, they got up. Slowly they crossed the hall, and on reaching the door, they stretched with satisfaction, forming a large "X" with their legs and arms, and after looking to the right and left, as if not knowing where to go, they disappeared.

Having said good-night to the chemist, the actors retired to sleep. Don Graciano and Leandro did the same. Neither at the table of "the cypresses," nor at that of "the intermittent ones," nor by the hearth, was there anyone left. As the number of patrons slowly diminished, the room, with its ribbed roof, its walls made dark by soot and dust, and its large pilaster from which sprung two symmetrical half-arches, seemed larger and more decorative than before. The air smelled of wine, sweat, and above all, smoke.

When Paulina, tired but satisfied with her earnings for the day, locked the door behind Hernandez Halcon and Don Diosdado, who were the last to leave, the parish clock was striking eleven.

X

AT dawn next day a burst of sky-rockets announced the festivity of the glorious Saint Eulogio, and shortly afterwards the municipal band, consisting of two drums and a pair of flutes, left the town hall to the lively tune of a military two-step. The Reveille, so highly praised by "Don Profundo" in his programme, was played by this scanty group of instruments. Then the musicians marched down the rough cobblestone street keeping step as best they could, and playing intermittently. During their intervals of silence, and preceded by a long roll of the drums, the loud voice of the crier rang out in the cold clarity of the morning:

"By order of the mayor, let it be known that the cattle fair will open today on the commons, and this afternoon from five o'clock on there will be dancing in the square!"

The announcement made, the small band continued its unsteady march along the crooked streets, stopping here and there at the crossways. Swarms of urchins, many of them naked, came forth in answer to their merry tunes, and the women, half dressed, peeped forth for a moment from the ancient bay balconies. From the vestibules, men in shirt-sleeves and tight, dark, corduroy trousers looked at the musicians and then, attracted by the gay racket, trailed after them.

At nine in the morning the market-place, drenched in sunlight, resounded with the tireless barking of the merchants,

repeating all the unique cries, the high-pitched screeches and colourfulness of a Moorish bazaar. The crockery stalls, and the numerous counters set in rows and covered with gewgaws —glass earrings, combs, rings, tinsel buttons, knives, razors, cigar boxes, thimbles, bracelets—glittered and sparkled gaily under the light. In the drygoods stalls the garden-like brightness of the percales predominated; berets, hung on horizontal strings, parodied sunflowers, and red, black, and blue sashes waved in the wind like crests. There were also many drinking places. The sale of ash sticks continued: those who bought them stationed themselves in groups like soldiers on guard. Others ambled about slowly through the crowd, and their long straight sticks, like lances, gave the market-place a warlike air. The conversation, shouting, hawking, laughing, haggling, and disputing rose to an uproar throughout the porticoes. Merchants and customers offered, asked, bargained, and the unusual animation enticed the townsfolk into the street. Customers crowded old Lucas's barber shop. Paulina, mounted on a stool, washed the windows of the café; in the show windows of the hardware store, the old merchandise faded by the sun and loaded with dust and fly specks, which had been on display until the night before, had been replaced by new objects; and in the doorway of the shop Marta Santoyo, grown ugly since her marriage, exhibited the hallowed convexity of her condition.

The artistic element of the fair was supplied by two blind musicians, who sold *romances* and ballads, and who were guided by a one-eyed woman; and by a photographer, who had arrived from Siguenza that morning, and had stretched a curtain between two pillars as a background for his pictures. This piece of canvas, on which an inexpert hand had painted palaces, fountains, and palm trees under a splendrous sky, inveigled the attention of the passerby. Those languid trees, which looked as if touched by the voluptuous lassitude of the tropics, but more so those fountains with the joyful activity of their spouts and pools overbrimming with crys-

talline water, had, in the grey dryness of the Castilian plain, the appearance of an hallucination. The white fairy-like palace, which seemed to be all marble, also made the crowd gape. Girls and boys stared at it without tiring. Was it possible that there could be buildings like that anywhere in the world? And if there were, what kind of people inhabited them and what kind of life could be lived in them? Aware of the admiration the curtain aroused, the photographer urged them to sit in a little chair placed in front of it.

"Right up here, gentlemen!" he would shout. "Make up your minds! Three pictures for a real. Better take advantage of this unusual opportunity, because I leave tomorrow. Three pictures for a real, ladies and gentlemen! . . . Don't need to think it over! Only a moment, and it's done!"

Those who stood in front smiled, lowered their heads, whispered:

"You go first!"

"Me? What for? I don't care for it."

"How do you know whether you do or not? You've never had a picture taken!"

In truth they all wanted to have their pictures taken, but did not dare: they were ashamed of suddenly finding themselves alone before the crowd. The herd spirit stifled the courage of initiative in them. Suddenly one of the boldest made up his mind, and blushing, sat down on the chair. After posing him as best he could, the photographer asked him to raise his head and smile. . . .

"All done!" he exclaimed triumphantly.

The silence which accompanied the operation and gave it solemnity was followed by a murmur of curiosity.

While the old square vibrated, almost palpitated, with the warm buzzing of the multitude, in Paulina's Inn, taking advantage of the ornamental effect of one of the arches that led from the kitchen to the hall, Nemesio Valentin and Teodoro were building the stage for the farce that evening on three wooden horses the mayor had lent them.

The boards for the floor of the stage, and the posts where the curtain and the backdrop were to be strung, belonged also to the Council, and in this difficult work Don Bernardo and the pharmacist assisted them, now as directors, now as helpers, according to the occasion.

The joviality and animated conversation among the workers told how quickly the job advanced, and to the satisfaction of them all it was finished by noon. For greater decoration and show Don Diosdado had a rug brought from his shop, which, though not very beautiful or large, added a great deal to the appearance of the stage. In the rug could be seen a tiger lying amidst flowers, and this motif not only harmonized with the "garden corner" painted on the background, but, according to Barral, gave the stage a vague suggestion of a zoological park.

"La Repetia," walking to and fro dusting, asked them to leave the curtain and background folded until the hour of the entertainment so as not to deprive the kitchen of light. The actors made no response; they were careful not to displease the innkeeper, whom they were not yet certain they would be able to pay. But Barral, who most enjoyed these riggings and fixtures, imposed his contrary wishes on those of Paulina.

"Get away with those heresies!" he exclaimed. "If the kitchen is dark, light a lamp . . . or cook in the dark! The theatre must be mysterious, half its enchantment lies in the curtain that hides it. Rooms wide open have no more interest than people who are always chattering about themselves, because we soon know what's inside them. If the people who come here for drinks or coffee during the day see the stage, they'll feel they already know what's going to be given and won't attend tonight. Don't you see?"

Barral was right. The stage fitted exactly between the wall and the pillar, and Paulina was the first to admire the decorative elegance with which the arch threw its curve over

the amplitude of the curtain, draped in vertical folds, alluring and enigmatic as a closed door.

In high spirits, Don Diosdado treated his friends to a brandy.

"Now," he said, "we have to get busy with advertising the show properly and arranging for the selling of the tickets."

The tickets, printed on blue paper, were all ready; the actors always carried them about on their travels. As for the hand-written posters which announced the show, Barral assured the actors that two—one at the entrance of the town hall and another on the façade of the Church of Saint Martin—were quite enough.

"What price should we charge for tickets?" asked Valentin.

The night before the pharmacist would have hesitated between twenty and twenty-five centimos, but now, buoyed up by the fine appearance of the stage, his lyrical heart overflowed with optimism.

"A real!" he exclaimed.

Nemesio Valentin shrugged his shoulders doubtfully. Don Bernardo agreed with the actor.

"A real?" the mayor exclaimed. "That's too much to charge!"

The actor added:

"I think so too!"

Aurora, who had just joined the group, was of the same opinion.

"I would put the entrance as low as possible," she said with the resignation of a sad soul accustomed to failure.

But Don Diosdado, with his high spirits and contagious faith in their success, won them over.

"To charge less than a real," he shouted, "would be to discredit the spectacle, to make it fail utterly! . . . At a real I'm sure we can fill the hall. Don't you worry. . . . You leave it entirely to me!"

Gaunt and slightly stooped, Paco Camacho entered the café. When he saw the curtain, his yellowish face, with its prominent cheekbones, expressed pleasure and surprise. His brother-in-law called him over:

"For once in your life you come in the nick of time. Look, here are twenty tickets for sale; they are to be sold for a real each!"

"A real! . . . Twenty-five centimos! . . . You must be dreaming! . . . Do you realize what you are doing? To charge more than fifteen is crazy."

"Nobody here asked for your opinion," replied Barral very gravely. "You do as you are told."

"All right then, all right! . . . Let's have the tickets," replied Camacho humbly.

"You better peddle them from house to house . . . and if you can't find buyers you'd better invent them. That's what you're an inventor for! Above all, don't give them out on trust, because afterwards no one will pay you. Cash down, mind you. And don't forget that you owe me a dollar."

He added:

"The first thing you are to do is to help Don Teodoro paste up the posters advertising the show. Better get the right paste, and do a good job, so that the boys can't tear them off. Post one on the town hall and the other at the entrance of Saint Martin's."

"At the entrance of the church! . . . Are you mad?"

"I don't mean in the vestibule, you dull ostrich!" shouted Barral, "but on the façade; today the whole town will file past there."

"What will Don Cirilo say?"

"What do you expect him to say? Nothing, of course!"

"He may tear it down!"

"I don't think so! If a priest refused such a small favour to other actors he would be utterly lacking in loyalty to his profession! Go on now, and don't waste too much time!"

Paco Camacho and Teodoro went out and at the door passed Hernandez Halcon, who came in curious to see how the theatre looked.

"Another one who comes as if sent by heaven!" exclaimed Barral pleasantly.

Don Blas greeted Valentin and his wife with a look and a grunt, and addressed himself to Don Diosdado and the mayor: "What about the show? They just told me that it had been given up!"

"Who gave you that misinformation? It must have been 'Don Profundo.' . . . Uhm . . . Come—admit I'm right."

"Not at all!" replied the doctor. "The news was given me by some one in the square. As a matter of fact, I haven't seen José Ramon."

"My dear friend," thundered Barral, "I assure you that the entertainment will be given and it will be a tremendous success, and you yourself will contribute to it by buying your ticket now. Unless you want several? . . ."

Don Blas could not prevent his face from showing that he was disgruntled.

"Save me a ticket," he mumbled.

Don Diosdado quickly and cheerfully handed him one. But he replied:

"No, you keep it! We're not going to die before tonight! . . . I shall take it later!"

Barral did not insist, suspecting that the doctor might not have any money with him—which was very probable.

"Don Profundo" and the corporal of the Civil Guard arrived shortly after and immediately behind them appeared Don Graciano and his son . . . and after them Rionda. Their curiosity, the desire to pry, brought them to the café.

Barral introduced the actors to Don José Ramon. After sitting down, the secretary of the Council felt it his duty to ask the strangers their impression of Carrascal del Horcajo. Nemesio Valentin expressed extreme pleasure with what he had seen, and "Don Profundo" gratefully undertook to

enumerate the excellencies of the town, and the beauty and fertility of its fields, ending up with his usual eulogy of the "Fountain of Health."

"What water! . . ." he repeated, "What water! . . . I assure you that there isn't anything better in the whole of Spain! . . ."

Don Diosdado, who was already certain of the success of the show, cut his peroration short with these sharp words:

"Well, Don José, speaking of other matters, we must help these worthy gentlemen, even if only for the selfish reason that we want them to take with them a happy memory of our town. Tell me then, how many tickets do you think you will need for tonight? I take it that Don Isidro will come along with you. . . . You should try to bring your friends along . . . you must spread a little propaganda for the show. In this work of publicity, you should be the leader because you know everybody."

Deep in thought, with brows knitted, his mittened hands resting on his crutch-like cane, "Don Profundo" grunted: "Uhmm . . . Uhmmm . . ." as if making a tremendous effort, or engaging in an harassing mental task. The production of the simplest idea had the tearing strain of childbirth on the rusty mental springs of the secretary of the Council.

"You can do more than anyone for our guests," Barral insisted. "It's a question of a very pleasant show, besides being very distinguished and much more urbane than the one our fellow townsmen give us every year by getting drunk and capering in the square."

All these reflections were useless and redundant, for the slow brain of "Don Profundo" was still pondering the possibility of being able to wrench Perez Cadenas from his routine habits and bring him to the show.

"I don't know," he finally said, "if I can make him come with me."

"That doesn't matter," cut in the chemist. "We're not interested in his coming, so long as he buys the ticket. Tell

me then, dear Don José Ramon, how many tickets do you think you need?"

"Just now," replied "Don Profundo," "I don't think I'll take any but mine."

He unbuttoned his overcoat and parsimoniously extracted five coins from his purse and with a square-nailed finger he pushed them forward one by one as if he were playing draughts.

Towards noon Don Diosdado bade the actors good-bye, telling them he would be back soon, and went off to dinner. Clara Luz, Andromaca, Julieta, Otello and Armando impatiently awaited him in the dining-room. Julieta and Andromaca were finishing up the dresses they would wear at the bullfight the following day. The two boys wanted to go along with the men who were fetching the bullocks that afternoon.

They had already finished their soup when Camacho appeared. His sallowness, his breathlessness, and the exhaustion with which he sank into the chair presaged nothing agreeable.

"I'm dead!" he declared.

"How many tickets have you sold?" asked the chemist impatiently.

Camacho did not answer, and sighed again.

"I bet," said Barral, "they've snatched them from your hands!"

"Did you give him many?" asked Clara Luz, who was as interested in the success of the actors as her husband.

"Twenty! . . ."

"That's fine! . . . And did you sell them all, brother?"

The inventor looked at his brother-in-law with the stoicism of a man who has made an effort which he knew beforehand to be futile, and answered:

"I haven't sold a single ticket. . . ."

This declaration disconcerted the pharmacist, who, to hide

his humiliation, dejectedly swallowed a whole glass of water, though he was not thirsty. After a few minutes he asked:

"Did you see Don Isidro?"

"I went to his house twice, but he had gone out."

"And Don Lotario?"

"I couldn't see him either. Since there was no school today, he left town and is in the fields. I also went to Lucas's barber shop, and spoke to several friends. I couldn't do a thing with them! . . . You ought to give up these theatrical enterprises. . . . People are only interested in going to the dance and drinking wine. . . ."

"The people," replied Don Diosdado proudly, "will go where I lead them, but to accomplish that requires a certain quality which you unfortunately don't even know by name, and that is the gift of an imposing personality."

As soon as dinner was over—which was served that day in a great hurry—Don Barral took leave of his family and, after warning his sons to return as soon as possible, for the shop could not remain that day without anyone to tend it, he took his cane and went straight to the café.

It was about three o'clock. In the square, fuller even than in the morning with dust, heat and noise, the crowd had increased. Groups of young men, leaning on their ash sticks, loafed under the porticoes.

All of a sudden from the other side of the square cries broke out above the noise, so desperate and plaintive that everybody stopped talking on the instant and ran towards the place from which they came. Don Diosdado followed the crowd, and when he arrived at the place he saw a dusky pedlar, of athletic build, crushing between his Herculean paws the hand of a child. Over a hundred people, the majority of them men, looked on the torture, curious and silent. The cruel and bloodthirsty spirit with which the mediæval crowds had watched the autos-da-fé came to birth again here. The pedlar had surprised the boy, on his hands and knees, sneaking under the counter to steal. He punished

him precisely—as a Moor might have done—on that part of his body which was most active in the crime.

The torturer, in whose hard, set face anger had turned the copper of his complexion pale, looked at the crowd about him with the cool and self-satisfied smugness of one who fulfils a duty.

"I'm punishing him because he's a thief," he explained.

The poor victim writhed in pain as if his tender little hand were caught in an iron gear. He dragged his half-naked body on the ground, struggled up again convulsively, and in the extremity of his anguish, his eyes bulged out of their sockets.

"I won't do it again!" he sobbed, "I won't do it again! Let me go!"

He could not cry for the very intensity of his pain paralysed his face; his voice was hardly audible; he was about to faint. Meanwhile the bully, with both hands, increased the pressure; his veins, swollen with blood, and his neck, which had turned purple, testified to the brutal ardour which he put into it. Here and there among the stupid and cowardly crowd brutal voices encouraged him:

"Give it to him!"

"Shameless thief! . . . Don't pity the brat! Let him pay for it!"

"Break his hand once for all! . . . You'll be doing him a favour. He won't learn to steal that way! . . ."

The crowd, far from pitying the boy, who was already altogether exhausted and could no longer say a word, turned against him, and, had they dared, would have stoned him. The bystanders put themselves in the tradesman's place, and their instinct for property flared up and made them pitilessly fierce.

Before that picture of barbarism, the generous Don Diosdado Barral lost all control of himself. A noble and quixotic wave of anger swept through him, and without a word, not stopping to consider the strength of his enemy, he raised

his cane, a thick knotty stick, and rained a shower of blows on the pedlar's head.

Stupefied, his close-cropped head bathed in blood, the torturer let his prey go. The little fellow fell down inert, his lean arms open like a cross.

"Don Diosdado! . . . Don Diosdado! . . ." murmured the attacked man, the popularity of the chemist imposing respect on him.

He slunk backwards, humiliated, without thinking of defending himself. But as Barral continued beating him, he recovered himself and pulled a knife from his belt. Several people held him back.

"Leave him alone," shouted the chemist, magnificently erect on his left leg. "Let him go. I know how to handle a beast! . . ."

As if spellbound, the entire crowd, which a few minutes before had filled the square, had quickly flowed to the place of the struggle. Prey to an intense curiosity they pushed and swayed, standing on tiptoes and craning their necks.

The pedlar, wiping the blood which flowed from his forehead and streaked his face with red, muttered in fury:

"I'll kill him. I don't care for his age or his quality. I'll kill him! . . . I swear it by the milk I sucked!"

The mob was silent and displeased. The great majority thought that Barral had gone a little too far. What wrong had the pedlar done in punishing the brat? Couldn't he defend his property? The man was perfectly right. In a case like this it was not merciful but immoral to protect the little thief. Some of the hypocritical bullies who surrounded the wounded man told him viciously, as they looked at the chemist in anger:

"Stick that old cripple in the belly, he deserves it!"

Without daring to face Barral, a few manifested their disapproval in loud voices, so that he could hear them. Don Diosdado was not daunted.

"You pack of beasts!" he shouted, wielding his cane,

challenging them; "so you think I had no business beating that brute! You wolves! You should be ashamed to stand there and look on at the torture of a helpless little creature. Suppose the brat loses his hand, what would you say then? . . . Lucky I'm here, ready, in the name of Justice, to break the skull of any cur that happens to need it. . . ."

This enraged speech provoked a disapproving murmur through the crowd, and had it not been for Leandro Santoyo, the chemist might have found himself in bad straits. But the miller, half by force and half by persuasion, drew him away and led him by the arm to the café. Barral, still furious, looked about him in wrath, and beat the pavement with the sharp butt of his cane.

"Do you see, my son, what kind of people they are?" he said. "Don't you see now how right I am when I declare insensitiveness to be the national disease? . . . If the Inquisition were to resume its work, I'm sure our populace would run to its tortures with the same noisy eagerness with which it crowds the bull ring or the cock pit . . . Can you imagine it! There were just now at least a hundred people watching that criminal break the hand of a little child and no one protested. What callousness! . . . What cruelty! . . . What a country!"

The chemist was right, and as Leandro listened to his friend, he remembered the old woman whom he had seen one morning many years ago stoning her own son.

At five o'clock, within the ring destined for the bull fight next day, the dance began. The musicians and many families occupied the surrounding benches. In the official box sat the smiling wife of the mayor accompanied by several friends. Below, in the arena, the multitude was so large that the dancers barely had room to move. To the strains of an habanera, badly mangled by the municipal band, the crowd, compact and impenetrable during the first few measures, began to swirl. The onlookers, nearly all men armed with ash sticks, grouped themselves in the middle of

the square, and around them like the celestial bodies the dancers revolved, swaying and turning with the music. The crude blue of the sky and the front of the buildings surrounding the square, bathed in the slanting light of the sun, with their wide black balconies filled with people, gave the place extraordinary colour and animation. The barkers had ceased their cries to listen to the music, and in the empty vestibules with their mellow half-light the tunes of the four artists of the Council, notwithstanding their primitive quality, awakened sweet resonances. A few minutes later, over that mass of grey sashes, white shirts, and black trousers, which slowly swirled at the edges, brushing the paling of the ring, there rose a cloud of dust like a tenuous silvery mist. The rest of the town was sunk in silence; the desire to watch the dancers had emptied the houses; the streets were deserted, and the square, towards which all the blood of the place had surged, palpitated with emotion like a young heart.

It was already six o'clock when for the third or fourth time Don Diosdado Barral, very worried about the doubtful success of the show, entered the café. Paulina had not yet lit the lamps, and in the half-darkness which filled the empty hall, the figures of Aurora Dominguez, of Teodoro and of Nemesio Valentin, each leaning an elbow on the table which had once covered the bones of the Presbyter Don Damian Rodriguez Carriles, had a strongly funereal air. No one of them spoke, and the weary abandon of their attitudes betrayed how long they had already been there.

The sudden and long-awaited entrance of the chemist reanimated them a little. Aurora smiled, her husband stifled a yawn, and Teodoro, who was at that moment beginning to stretch, repressed himself.

"Well, let's get right down to the point! What's new?"

"Just now we couldn't give you any worse news," replied Valentin.

"How many tickets have been sold?"

"Two: one to 'Don Profundo,' already paid for, and the other one to Don Blas, who hasn't paid yet."

"We have already collected, therefore," said the actress, smiling, "the grand total of one real."

"And Paco, my brother-in-law?"

"He was around here after lunch and hasn't returned. He was rather crestfallen. We don't believe he'll do anything."

"What a pity about the stage!" sighed Aurora. "I'm afraid we'll have to leave the place without using it."

Barral flushed with the vexation of probable defeat. Faith did not abandon him, however, and though he sat down, he spoke as if he were standing on his left leg.

"We needn't despair!" he said. "Hope, like life, must fight its battle within us to the last breath. We shall fill the theatre. Let us see, let's figure it out. Don Bernardo will buy his ticket; he won't fail us! Graciano Garcia won't fail us either; nor will Rogelio, his son; Don Cirilo . . . Don Blas . . . or Leandro . . ."

The miller, whom the chemist had not taken the trouble to introduce, broke in with a gesture of assent. And since Barral had stopped in the enumeration of the attendance they could count on, Teodoro exclaimed:

"The people you have named will contribute six reals, which added to 'Don Profundo's' ticket mounts up to one peseta and three-quarters. The paper the tickets are printed on is worth more than that! . . ."

High on a chair, "La Repetia" had just lit one of the four lamps with which the hall was illuminated, and in the dim yellow light the silhouettes of the players and of the graveyard slabs on the tables emerged from the shadows in spectral relief.

Turning the face of his watch towards the light, Don Diosdado read the hour with difficulty.

"It's six fifteen . . ." he murmured.

In the half-dark square the orchestra scattered the notes

of a popular dance, and the roguish melody, inviting the dancers to closer embrace, seemed to write a burlesque commentary on the hopes of the chemist.

The latter continued, speaking to himself:

"The show is announced for nine o'clock. Then we still have about three hours. . . ."

The actors looked at him quizzically, wondering what he was leading up to. There was a brief silence, during which Don Diosdado, after looking several times towards the beams of the roof, riveted his gaze on the floor, his eyes wide and intent as if he were meditating on the antipodes. Suddenly he stopped playing with his moustache, and raised his strong head; his face was lit with joy.

"I have just thought of a trick to fill the theatre from top to bottom!" he asserted. "But the truth is, I don't know whether I should propose it to you!"

The actors protested.

"Artists," said Barral, trying to make himself clear, "are so sensitive! And I don't want my words to hurt in the least."

Valentin assured him that they had long ago lost their professional pride; that noble pride, so often the origin of high inspiration, they had gradually shed along the road with the leather of their shoes. The only thing that worried them therefore was the monetary problem, and not the desire to cover themselves with glory in Carrascal del Horcajo.

"If that's the case," replied Don Diosdado, unable to contain his joy, "I'll tell you my proposition. It's this; if you have no objection to my wife, my daughter and myself taking part in the programme, the whole town will crowd into the theatre. I can guarantee that!"

Barral's impulsive generosity filled the actors with gratitude and surprise.

"Would you really do that for us?" asked Valentin.

"I can't undertake to come out before your professional eyes with flying colours," replied Don Diosdado, "but I

wouldn't hesitate a moment to climb on to the stage and say my lines."

"But what will your wife think of us? She had the kindness to come and greet me this afternoon," said Aurora. "Now she'll say that we are abusing her generosity."

"My plan would only amuse my wife. You don't know her. She is much more of an artist, and much more full of fun than I. Are we agreed then? Do you accept our co-operation?"

Teodoro and Nemesio Valentin showered enthusiastic embraces on the chemist.

"Do we accept your collaboration! You don't seem to know you are offering us the first prize of the lottery!"

Without answering this flattery Don Diosdado left his chair and called loudly to Paulina. Drying her hands on her apron, the plump innkeeper came running towards him.

"Listen," said the chemist, tweaking her chin affectionately, "I just want to tell you that my wife, Andromaca, and I will take part in the show this evening. Tell everybody!"

This news was a joyous surprise to the innkeeper.

"I'll be blessed! . . . Have you gone crazy? I can't believe it. At your age, too!"

"Tell everybody!" repeated Barral. "Stand at the door and tell everybody the great news, everyone you know going by. . . . And something else. I want you to help me spite the doctor. What's more, I'll give you a share of the profits. We'll give you five centimos for every two tickets you sell."

Hurriedly he left the café bound for his house. In front of the hardware store he saw Don Graciano surrounded by several neighbours, and he approached the group.

"You mustn't fail to attend tonight's performance," he said. "Clara Luz, my daughter Andromaca, and I are going to take part."

His listeners stood gaping open-mouthed, looking at the chemist, who continued on his way.

"What did you say?" shouted the shopkeeper after him, thinking he hadn't heard correctly.

"I said that tonight," replied Don Diosdado, turning his head without stopping, "I make my debut as an actor. The show starts at nine. You must come early if you want to find seats."

His words stirred the curiosity of the promenaders in the porticoes. All eyes turned towards the chemist full of curiosity. People whispered:

"Is it true, do you think?"

"He said so himself!"

"Well, it surely will be funny. I'm certainly going to see him!"

Tapping louder than usual with the sharp butt of his cane, Don Diosdado peeped into the barber shop, which had been full of customers since early morning.

"Friend Lucas!" shouted Barral, putting his big ruddy head within the door so that his words might be heard more clearly, "you know I'm much more of an actor than a pharmacist, don't you? Well, the fateful hour of my life has come. I'm playing in the theatre tonight. If you want to see me perform . . ."

"Say . . . what do you mean?"

But the astute Barral was already on his way.

"You had better come and applaud me. And come early. The curtain rises at nine sharp."

He said the same thing to "Don Profundo," Don Lotario, and others whom he met on the way. In front of the grocery store he saw Camacho in the company of Rionda and the corporal of the Civil Guard. The inventor looked scared and called Barral aside.

"Is it true," he asked confidentially, "what I've heard?"

"What have you heard?"

"That my sister and you were going to take part in the show tonight."

"It's quite true. The programme is as follows: the first

part is in charge of the actors. I don't know yet what they are thinking of giving. Then Clara Luz, Andromaca, and I will give my comedy *The White Gloves*, and to close the performance Teodoro Dominguez will perform a juggling act and raffle a watch."

"I can't believe it!"

"We shall see tonight!"

"How I should like to play," said Camacho earnestly.

"That too?" the chemist interrupted him. "You with your stammer, and I with my limp. . . . A pretty pair we would make! . . . But if you want a part in the show why don't you accept the one of publicity agent? You do as I tell you. Get the town crier, give him one or two reals, and ask him to announce my debut in the square twice between dances. Do you get that? Twice! Tell him I'm asking him to."

He took hold of Camacho and, to give him courage, embraced him. The inventor, who was very devoted to his brother-in-law, was extremely grateful for this demonstration of affection.

"I count on you, Paco!" Barral shouted after him. "If you help me spread the news we shall triumph. I count on you then! . . . Don't forget! After what Don Blas said to me this morning and what I answered, it's a matter of pride for me to fill the theatre."

When Don Diosdado returned to his shop, Clara Luz and Andromaca were impatiently awaiting him. They had already heard that they were to act in the performance and were very happy and at the same time very nervous.

"In less than half an hour," exclaimed the chemist's wife, "ten or twelve people have come here to tell me."

"How do you like my idea?"

"Fine. We can do a real piece of charity that way; there's no doubt that without our help those poor actors would be leaving this town with empty hands. And we'll also have the pleasure of trying out your comedy. The moment An-

dromaca heard the news she started to go over her part again."

In anticipation of the play, the impressionable old lady seemed rejuvenated.

Of all the little theatrical pieces in verse and prose Don Diosdado had written to while away the time during his enforced idleness, *The White Gloves*—in which only three persons take part—was the one he liked best. He wrote this comedy in verse about ten years before, when Clara Luz was about to give birth to Julieta, and because he had read it to the family several times, and also because the verses had a certain dramatic cadence to them, they all knew it by heart.

Andromaca was excited over what make-up she was to use, and her pale face, framed by her golden hair, displayed a feverish anxiety.

"The best thing to do," her father advised, "would be to present ourselves as simply as we can, just as we are now, without dressing up, so that evil tongues won't say that we wanted to show off. I believe you'll look perfectly well in your new shoes and blue dress."

Clara Luz was worried about the setting, but the chemist, so suddenly become an actor, was much more concerned about the interpretation of the comedy than about the stage decorations and the costumes.

"I'm afraid," he said, "that my nervousness will make me forget my part."

At half past seven Julieta, who had spent the afternoon with some friends, came in, and shortly afterwards, Otello and Armando. They all knew what was going to happen and their exuberance broke out in laughter, playful antics and mutual nudging. They had never before attended the theatre, and the expectation turned their heads.

"I bet one of my fingers," said Otello, "that you'll have to fight your way into the café tonight."

Paco Camacho, who came in fanning himself with his

hat and fell limp on the nearest chair he could find, confirmed these flattering prospects.

"You're the talk of the town," he exclaimed. "What a success! I would never have believed it! Don Blas will froth at the mouth with anger! . . . I assure you that in spite of the dance there will no no room for the public in the hall."

At eight o'clock they all sat down to dinner without appetite. Julieta, Otello, Armando and Camacho talked all at once. Clara Luz and Andromaca kept silent, and now and then looked off absorbed in the mental recital of their lines. Barral could not talk either. From time to time, following the thread of his thoughts, he looked at the portraits of illustrious artists which adorned the walls of the room in the back of the store, and seemed to beg help and inspiration of them. He reflected sadly that his work, after obeying Horace's precept for more than ten years, was now ready to make its bow, if not before the lime-light of a real theatre, at least before the yellowish and misty light of the four kerosene lamps which illuminated Paulina's café. Pondering these things, in spite of his fifty odd years, Don Diosdado felt his soul turn back to his youthful dreams and ambitions, already so distant. "Ah! how happy and how different would my life have been," he sighed, "had not Manuel Santoyo made me a cripple!"

Suddenly he came to himself, stirred by the solemnity of the moment.

"Do you hear?" he asked. "It seems to me that there are more people along the porticoes tonight than usual."

"Of course!" exclaimed Camacho. "The people are stopping in front of the shop, before going to the theatre, to see you come out. Perhaps they're going to surprise you with an ovation. Your idea has met with a good deal of favourable comment, because everybody knows that you're doing it to save the starving actors from the poorhouse!"

Without waiting for the coffee to be served Barral got up, and standing on his short leg, said:

"Let's go!"

Clara Luz and Andromaca were a bit pale.

"So soon?" asked his wife.

She was right; it was only twenty minutes past eight.

"Better so," he said. "Right now there won't be anyone in the café. Once there, we shall hide behind the stage, in the kitchen. Actors should not let themselves be seen before the performance."

Turning towards his daughter he asked:

"Are you scared? Do you remember your part? . . ."

Blushing, the girl answered, not very sure of herself:

"I think so! . . ."

"Do you know yours, Clara Luz?"

His wife answered evasively. She was afraid of her nerves, all too unsteady; and as the time approached, she had to admit, she was gradually losing control of herself. Barral, too, when he thought of the play, had a sinking sensation in the pit of his stomach.

"The best thing would be to have a prompter," he said, "because the work is in verse, and if we skip a couple of lines, good-bye to the play! . . ."

"Would you like me to do it?" Camacho proposed.

"No, by no means," answered Barral emphatically. "You would begin to stammer and the remedy would be much worse than the disease."

While Clara Luz and the girls were leaving and Barral was giving orders to the servant not to call him unless some one came with an urgent prescription, Otello and Armando fought in a corner over the manuscript of *The White Gloves.*

Otello, three years older than his brother, tried to take it from him by force.

"Don't you understand, you booby, that if you prompt you won't be able to see the show?" he asked his brother in a subdued but angry voice. "What a jackass you can be!"

"Well, that applies to you too!" answered Armando

logically. "If you prompt the show, how can you expect to see it?"

The manuscript crackled in the grip of the four hands that held it fast. Finally enraged, Otello struck his brother with both hands, and, taking advantage of this, Armando managed to gain possession of the copy and flee.

When Don Diosdado arrived at the hall followed by his family, the place was utterly empty and in the badly lit desolation the curtain which enclosed the stage, almost black, and furrowed by deep vertical folds, was reminiscent of those enormous curtain drops which in Spain cover the altars during the devotional exercises of Passion Thursday. The tables had disappeared, but more than two hundred and fifty chairs of different sizes, shapes, and ages, placed in irregular rows, filled the hall.

Cutting through one of the side aisles, the Barral family went behind the platform, where they greeted Paulina and the three actors, who had just finished their supper under the wide bell of the fireplace. Aurora Dominguez kissed Clara Luz and Andromaca, and eloquently expressed the gratitude and love she felt for them, on account of the sacrifice they were making to help them with the entertainment.

"We owe everything to you," she repeated, "and thanks to you we will be able to continue our journey."

Don Diosdado, meanwhile, was talking to Valentin and Teodoro, who were also trying to express their gratitude, and for the first time, no doubt due to stage-fright, the chemist had a truly fraternal feeling for these two men.

Fifteen minutes before nine the public began to arrive. From where he was sitting, Barral could not see the crowd, but that threatening and growing hubbub of footsteps, coughing, scraping of chairs and conversation, gave him a strange feeling of uneasiness.

"All these brutes," he said, "come ready to jeer; they come to see if 'Don Diosdado will forget his part.' "

These reflections made his mouth dry and were like a throttling hand on his throat.

"I'm going to sit down," whispered Paco in his brother-in-law's ear, "because if we don't look out we won't find a place to sit, do you understand me?"

"Go and may God be with you," the chemist mumbled.

"Good luck, father," Otello whispered, and again, "So long, father! . . . Careful now! . . ."

Camacho was already leaving, turning his head and making encouraging signs to him. His smiling, skinny figure irritated Barral.

"Even that fool," he thought, "probably suffering from chronic inflammation of the spinal cord, is getting ready to judge me."

And suddenly he thought that even his children were abandoning him and banded against him, and fear made him still angrier. Fortunately, an ironic reflection made him smile and cheered him.

"I wonder what Molière suffered," he thought, "when he acted in the first of his own plays!"

Because of the many friends Barral had throughout the district, and also because of the tussle of the afternoon in defence of the child, which had proven his courage and nobility, people fought over the seats to the point of blows, and when the curtain went up, there were over fifty persons standing in the doorways and along the walls.

When the first part of the show was ended, and Barral and his wife appeared on the scene, their neighbours gave them a deafening ovation. The debut of *The White Gloves* made such a great hit, that even Don Isidro, forgetting for the moment the enmity existing between them since the chemist burnt his cloak, began to applaud. Even "Don Profundo" seemed moved by the spectacle, and the tears rolled down Paco Camacho's cheeks. Never, in the stagnant humdrum environment of Carrascal del Horcajo, had anyone seen excitement to equal it.

After the comedy Teodoro Rodriguez successfully performed some juggling tricks, and ended the entertainment with the raffle of a watch which, as arranged beforehand, was won by Don Diosdado. This apparent caprice of Fortune pleased everybody, and the applause began again.

"He deserves it! He deserves it! . . ." they repeated.

Camacho, ignorant of the trick played on the public by Teodoro and his brother-in-law, was squirming in his seat as if ants were crawling over him and repeating to himself:

"It was God's will! . . . God's, who wanted to reward him for his good heart! . . ."

It was past eleven, when the last spectators left. Then the actors, in the presence of Don Blas, who had approached them to congratulate the chemist on his great success, "Don Profundo," the mayor, Leandro Santoyo, and a few other "intimate friends," counted their profits, which amounted to one hundred and sixty-two pesetas. Aurora Dominguez was crying. It was a long time since they had possessed such a fortune.

"Without you," said the actress, embracing Clara Luz, "we would have failed entirely, and I don't know what would have become of us. We must thank the good God who put you in our path."

And she added, approaching her confidentially, lowering her voice so that no one else could hear her but Clara Luz:

"If my child is a girl, I shall give her your name."

Then, approaching Andromaca and kissing her cheek, she said in the same confidential tone:

"I hope it will be a girl and look like you! . . ."

Nemesio Valentin had called Paulina to one side to inquire how much they owed her. Don Diosdado broke in:

"You owe her nothing! You are my guests!"

With this last delicate kindness he topped his generous work. The actors, sincerely moved, could not tire of praising him.

"Clara Luz, 'the good' . . . and Don Diosdado, 'the

unique,'" they said, "it will be impossible ever to forget you!"

And Aurora:

"Who would suspect that in a desolate corner like this we could find such a couple?"

It was true. Don Diosdado, in spite of his uncertain temper—which he could, however, always subdue—and Clara Luz, genuinely kind and happy, crowned with her beautiful white hair, appeared, against the murky environment of the town, like two souls apart, bathed in sunlight.

XI

SUNDAY morning dawned warm and blue. At an early hour, while the bells continued to summon the faithful with their most deafening peals, the whole male population, having already heard mass, hurried towards the commons to watch the enclosing of the bulls. The dusty, irregular and usually silent little square of Saint Martin overflowed with people. Doña Gerarda and Alfonsa, peering behind the screen of their lookout since early morning, were entertained to the fullest. Standing, in order to widen their field of view, arm in arm, each shared with the other the results of her own observations.

"There comes Martin Santoyo! . . . He's wearing his new suit," mumbled Alfonsa.

"He's a hard-working boy, and very pious. He goes to confession every month, and never misses mass. I like him better than his father."

"Look, there comes Don Bernardo. I wonder why his wife is not with him."

"I am sure he left her glued to the balcony. I don't know anyone as curious as she."

They watched their acquaintances go by alone, or in the company of their family or friends: "Don Profundo"; the Barral girls, for though their father was a "rationalist" and anti-clerical, he did not object to his daughters going to church, an inexpensive diversion which takes the place of the theatre in small towns; Don Lotario, followed by his

children; Paulina; Celedonio Rionda and wife, with their offspring; Paco Camacho, "the inventor," whose teeth, always showing behind his foolish lips, gave him a rather pleasant expression; Graciano and his daughter-in-law, Marta Santoyo; Lucas, the barber; Lisardo, the beggar and many others whose names and circumstances the two gossips brought up with ease from their retentive memories.

At the door of the church, as at the mouth of an ant-heap, the whole black-garbed crowd swirled rapidly and silently. Some were arriving, but most of them, having said their prayers, were already leaving. The women, hiding their faces with their overskirts held over their heads, hurried home, while the men, possessed suddenly by a clamorous excitement, started for the grounds where the bulls were pasturing.

Cayetano Rionda, who that year became of age for military service, Otello and Armando Barral, Eusebio and Sabino, sons of Hernandez Halcon, and other young men, were talking on a corner of the square, waiting for Martin Santoyo. All of them had brought their ash clubs with them, and their faces, like their apparel, proclaimed the holiday.

"If he doesn't come soon we'll go," said one of them.

A few moments later Matias and Mateo Santoyo, just through with mass, joined them. Celedonio asked them:

"Where is Martin?"

"He stayed in church."

"What's he doing?"

"He told us to go, because he was going to confession; he said not to wait for him."

"If we had known it," broke in Celedonio with an oath, "we wouldn't have waited for him so long. You can never count on my cousin. He's always the same! . . . He's nothing but a killjoy!"

Without further talk, they all hurried in a group towards where the bulls were kept. Though their fathers were not friends, Cayetano, Matias and Mateo liked one another well enough.

The pen where the bulls were to remain until the time of the fight was on the ground floor of the town hall, and from there to the ancient door of the old wall through which the animals would have to enter, the street crossings were closed with boards and carts placed cross-wise, so that the bulls would not escape.

The task of letting the cattle out of the enclosure where they were kept over night was a difficult one. Restlessly, the wild bulls moved within the circle formed by the bell oxen acting as leaders. The cattle drivers, handsome on their mounts, rode around them unable to head the mass towards the gate. Frightened, the animals ran in the opposite direction, bumping and butting each other, and the shouting and whistling of the curious crowd mounted on the top of the fence made them only the more nervous. From time to time a stone, thrown with good aim by a spectator, hit one of the animals. This vexatious coming and going lasted for some time, until one of the leaders accidentally went through the gate of the pen, which wasn't very wide, and behind him the rest of the animals rushed with a frightful hoarse uproar, raising a dense cloud of dust. Eager to escape, the bulls in the rear tried to jump over those ahead of them.

The crowd which had been perched on the board fence jumped down and started to run behind the herd. The *vaqueros* formed a brilliant escort, standing in their stirrups and spiritedly wielding their long goads. These were moments filled with the flare of brave and passionate emotion, to which the clamour and urging of the mob, the shouts of the drivers, the confused clang of the oxen's bells, the green expanse of the field, and the golden magic of the sun, added sanguinary and crude embellishment.

Far off, in the direction of the town, and near the first houses, where another large crowd had gathered, one could hear the nervous shouts of expectancy.

"There they come! . . . They're coming! . . ."

Cayetano Rionda, Matias, and their friends ran at full

speed ahead of the bulls, around which the leaders, discreetly spread, made a pacifying ring. The danger of falling and of being trampled on by the herd spurred them on and filled them with exhilaration. From all sides, hurrying across the plain, men in shirt-sleeves, riding and on foot, hastened to increase the hectic bustle. The runners were already crowning the uphill road which led to the town, and which, passing between two ditches, became narrower and narrower.

"Quick, hurry, hurry!" Cayetano shouted.

Minding no one but himself, he made a tremendous effort and increased his speed. He wanted to cross the arch under which they had to pass before the animals caught up with him. But his efforts were in vain, for the drivers goaded the cattle on, and he was almost thrown to the ground by the animal galloping behind him, which was acting as leader for the rest. Under the ancient arch, filled with the resonance of shouting and clatter, the thunderous noise of the fugitive and confused herd increased. The dust became thicker. Ahead of the running crowd, bathed in a flow of perspiration, Cayetano, vigorous and agile, rushed on. It was a case of everybody for himself. It was impossible to turn back, or to find shelter in a turn of the road. Each house owner had closed his own door, and it was not easy to climb up into the carts which, filled with women, blocked the entrance of the side streets. From the wide balconies, full of people, women's voices called to the running boys.

"Go on, run, run!"

Ahead of them, in the narrow, inclined, crooked streets, obstacles were cleared away by magic and the people who still remained in them disappeared as if the houses had absorbed them. Running in this manner, with a deafening rumble, men and cattle came into the square, and after a few minutes, thanks to the leading bulls, the herders managed to drive the two young bullocks into their pen in the lower floor of the council hall.

Cayetano and his friends went to Paulina's Inn, not only

to refresh themselves after the run, but also to meet the bullfighters who, it was rumoured, had already arrived. There they were to be found, in fact, sitting at one of the tables. There were four of them, and their trousers, exaggeratedly tight at the waist, their brilliantly coloured sashes, their little jackets of black velvet adorned with golden tinsel, their shirts with pleated fronts, their stiff wide-brimmed hats, and the elegance and slim lines of their figures, proclaimed their profession. The matador was not yet twenty. They called him "Panduro"—but the growing fame of his nickname which meant "Hard Bread" was not in proportion to his emoluments, for he was only charging sixty pesetas for killing the bulls and for the service of his team.

From the porticoes a group of townspeople examined them curiously. In their faces, because the fighters lacked prestige, there was more irony than admiration.

"They're a hungry-looking lot!" they whispered.

"If they don't do well we'll break their backs with the hiding we'll give them!"

When Paulina saw the sons of Barral and Hernandez Halcon, she hurried to offer them a table, but they refused it. In the kitchen, a little hidden from the public, they would feel better. Cayetano Rionda and Matias Santoyo asked for rum. The others ordered wine. With great gaiety, not taking the trouble to sit down, they began to comment on the danger of getting the bulls into the enclosure. How hard it had been for the herders to make the animals leave their pen; the stupidity of the leading bulls; the sudden speed with which the small herd had started for the town, and their violence as they went under the arch. At that moment, the most critical for the runners, a brutal hand had thrown a stone at the running crowd.

"I heard it whistle past me. It hurt a boy who was near me!" Mateo said.

"Who threw it?"

"No one knew. They say that one of 'El Migao's' sons did it."

"Ciriaco?"

"Yes, I guess it was he!"

"What a brute! If I had seen him I'd have knocked him stiff."

Fired by the drink, ready either for a good time or for a fight, they emptied their glasses again. The smoke from their cigarettes added to their excitement. They poked fun at one another, and as they talked, they pushed and tugged at each other, boasting of their strength. Some one remembered how Armando Barral shortly before reaching the town had fallen into one of the drain ditches, full of black mud, which flanked the road, and they all laughed boisterously. The victim could not deny the fact, and his blushes and the deplorable state of his clothes carried the general hilarity to the point of foulness. With clumsy blows and pointed words his friends turned him about and ridiculed him. Red with shame Armando tried to laugh it down, and lowered his eyes.

"You almost fell yourself," mumbled Armando addressing himself to Cayetano, "when the leader behind you caught up with you."

"What of it! I didn't! My legs are hard. You can touch them if you want to. Not like yours, like a woman's."

These words offended Otello.

"Listen here, there are no milksops in my family!"

"What do you mean by that?" replied Rionda.

"The Moor of Venice" held him by the lapel of his jacket and looked him in the eye.

"I mean that in my family the women are women, and the men are as much men as they need to be!"

Cayetano, who had a quick temper, paled with anger.

"All right," he said, "but while we find that out, take your hand off me . . . if you don't want me to do it for you!"

Threatening, like two young cocks in a barnyard, they glared at each other. The ancient hatred which had once

stirred their ancestors, boiled now in their veins. Fortunately, headed by Armando, the others all interposed in a friendly way and the quarrel ended. They drank again.

Slightly dizzy, Cayetano Rionda insisted on going out to look for Martin. He boasted of knowing the untamed shyness of his cousin, and thought him capable of staying away from the bullfight, unless he was taken there.

"Do you want to bet anything," he asked aloud, "that since he's not working today, he's at the mill tending the rose bush?"

Matias answered:

"Sure he is!"

"Let's go and find him. That'll be lots of fun."

They left the inn, and walking through the crowded porticoes they arrived at the shop of Antonio, "El Migao," where Cayetano insisted that they have another drink. What the son of Irene Santoyo really wanted was to find Ciriaco and provoke him, if it could be discovered that he was really the one who threw the stone which almost hit Mateo. He felt a need to vent his anger, arising from his quarrel with Otello and which had not yet altogether subsided. But he did not succeed. Ciriaco had not returned.

Since it was near the noon hour, and therefore time for dinner, Otello and Armando took leave of their friends, promising to join them a little later to go to the bullfight; and Cayetano, Matias and Mateo Santoyo, and the doctor's sons went on to the mill.

"If uncle Manuel is in good humour," said Rionda, "he might even ask us to stay for dinner."

Standing at Paco Camacho's door, they saw their cousins Domingo and Justo, who were talking to the inventor of the "reflector-matches." Cayetano greeted them with a flourish, throwing his head backwards and raising one arm:

"Hello, fellows!"

"Hello!" they replied.

"We're going to the mill; do you want to come along?"

They did not accept the invitation, not wishing to walk with Mateo and Matias, with whom they were not on speaking terms.

The others continued on their way, and when they approached the mill they were surprised to find that what Cayetano Rionda had told them was true; Martin Santoyo, standing on a ladder, was watering his rose bush, which was now more blooming and fresher than ever. Under the sun his small reddish head had the flaming colour of a carrot. They broke into laughter all at once.

"We might still be waiting for you at the church door!" shouted Cayetano.

Martin turned around to the newcomers but neither his locked mouth nor his eyes betrayed emotion.

"I said," insisted Cayetano, "that we might still be waiting for you!"

"When I was through confession," replied Martin, "I went looking for you, but couldn't find you. I wasn't surprised because it was late already. Then I came here."

"Your own hard luck," said Cayetano; "you missed the fun!"

During this brief conversation Martin Santoyo had come down from the ladder, and his steely grey-blue eyes smiled as though the sweetness which filled them when he tended the rose bush was still overflowing from them.

"Where is father?" asked Matias.

"He's working."

"Who's at home?"

"All the women, I believe."

Matias entered the mill. Cayetano Rionda approached Martin and playfully jostled him.

"It doesn't seem possible that a man like you should find pleasure in flowers," he said.

Annoyed, his cousin twisted his lips into a grin. Clumsily, aggressively, Cayetano continued:

"Do you hear me? . . . You look like an old man,

though you aren't. A real man likes bullfights, gambling, women and wine. Not flowers. Don't you agree with me?"

Mateo and the doctor's sons laughed approvingly. Spurred on by them, the aggressor continued:

"Listen, cousin, when are you coming with us to Siguenza for a good time with the girls?"

Matias, who was just then coming out, burst into a guffaw.

"Why are you talking to him about what he doesn't understand? Haven't I preached to him about that? . . . You would think he wanted to die a virgin."

Martin Santoyo turned his back on the raillers and, bending at the foot of the rose bush, began to remove the earth with his hoe. Cayetano approached him and gave him a tap with his foot.

"Listen, cousin!"

This time Martin could not disguise his anger and, straightening up, he asked:

"What do you want? . . . Why don't you let me alone? . . . Am I bothering you? . . . You act as if you were drunk!"

"There is nobody drunk here!" answered Cayetano. "We're only trying to convince you that men don't bother with flowers. If you had been with us this morning, you would have had a little fun! . . ."

Though jesting, his words covered an ill-disguised hostility. He added, changing his tone:

"Are you coming to the bullfight with us?"

"I'll see about it."

"What's the idea of answering 'I'll see'? Either say yes or no!"

"So that we can know how we stand," added Mateo, helping his cousin.

"We aren't going to treat you like a girl," contributed Matias.

His brows knitted, Martin answered:

"When does the fight start? Isn't it at five o'clock? . . . I'll meet you at that time in the square, then. What's the idea of bothering me?"

"And what are you going to do until then?" asked his cousin, bursting out laughing. "Are you going to play with your rose bush?"

"That's what I planted it for."

"Really? . . . But at least you ought to be generous and give us a few roses to wear this afternoon."

Martin, who had his back to them at that moment, bending down to pick up his watering pot, turned quickly and threateningly. Shaking with anger, he appeared leaner and taller than ever.

"Give you my flowers? . . ." he exclaimed. "I'd rather throw them to the pigs first."

Cayetano, whose courage was increased by the alcohol, replied dryly:

"That's an insult to me, cousin. And don't make threats, because I won't put up with them."

Santoyo, his fists clenched, made a move towards the challenger, but the timely interference of Matias and Mateo halted him. Meanwhile Rionda was struggling to break loose from the doctor's sons, who were holding him fast and pushing him away. Prevented from giving way to their anger, the two antagonists glared at each other.

"Do you know what I'm thinking?" shouted Cayetano. "I've made up my mind to cut your rose bush—before tonight!"

Martin paled, and ceased struggling with his brothers. An ominous serenity filled him.

"You'll never do that!" he said.

"I won't?" insisted Cayetano, trying to smile sarcastically. "You'll see if I won't. I'll cut that rose bush down!"

"You lie!"

"You'll see if I lie soon enough! I say that rose bush won't last until sunset!"

Martin Santoyo took a step forward and his gesture had a hieratic majesty.

"You won't do it! . . . You won't!" he murmured. "The Virgin will take that evil thought from your head."

"I'll cut it!" insisted Rionda. "On my word of honour, I will!"

"Then I swear," replied Martin, stammering in his earnestness, "that if you carry out your threat I'll eat the tongue you made it with. I swear it!"

He stretched his right arm horizontally with the palm of his hand turned downwards, as if resting it on an invisible Bible and, raising his eyes as if the sky were at that moment an altar for him, he repeated:

"I swear it in the name of God!"

Once he had said these words, which those about heeded hardly at all, he picked up his watering pail and hoe, which he used especially for the cultivation of his rose bush, and with his head down, as if staggering under the weight of his oath, he entered the mill.

"That killjoy," grumbled Cayetano, "has spoilt the morning for us. Who can ask Uncle Manuel now to invite us for dinner?"

Matias and his brother were of the same opinion. They would lunch at the mill, and immediately afterwards would return to the town. At four they promised to meet at the inn.

"We'll take Martin along with us," Matias added, "so that you can make up when we're all together."

With this understanding they separated.

Walking towards the town, Cayetano aired his anger.

"I'm furious! . . . Damn it! . . . We could have all eaten together, but for that fool. He's spoilt our fun; and now each of us has to go to his own house!"

"It was your own fault," commented Sabino.

"I? . . . Are you going to blame me now?"

"You stirred him up!"

"I did? . . . You lie! . . . I was just teasing. He was

the one who insulted me, telling me he'd rather throw his flowers to the pigs. . . . My cousin thinks he's a brave one, but I won't put up with it!"

"What are you going to do to the rose bush?"

Rionda stopped to look at his questioner.

"What do you think I'm going to do? . . . I'm going to cut it down, of course! . . . What did you think? . . . If it should sprout ten times, I'd cut it ten times. I'm surprised that you should ask me, knowing me as you do! I'm going to cut it at the root! When I promise something I keep my word!"

At the mill, once their dinner was ended, Matias and Mateo managed to make Martin consent to go with them to the bullfight. According to them—and they spoke in this manner to calm their brother—Cayetano Rionda never really thought of cutting the rose bush; he said so, they thought, only out of bravado.

"Besides," they concluded, "nobody is forcing you to go with him. We'll sit separately, where we want to . . . and that'll be much better!"

There were very few people left at the mill. Monica, Macaria, and Matilde had been in Marta's shop since morning. And with the excuse of the holiday, Leandro, Petra, and their children had gone for dinner to Irene's house, from the balcony of which they watched the driving of the bulls into town. Their absence made Domitila so contented that she thought she would burst with pleasure. Since her brother-in-law had gotten married this was the first time in twenty years that she found herself fully the owner of her own house. "If they only wouldn't return," she thought, "I would wear a crown of joy!"

Manuel Santoyo was beginning to drink his coffee, when he heard a noise in the back yard. Surprised, he looked at his wife.

"Who is out there?"

"Agueda."

The miller made a gesture of surprise. He had forgotten the girl.

"I thought," he said, "that she was in town with my brother. What is she doing?"

"She's ironing."

"Why do you let her iron when she's sick?"

Domitila shrugged her shoulders and looked at "the master" contemptuously. She was irritated to see him so merciful.

"If she can't work," she said, "so much the worse for her."

Manuel inquired whether Agueda had eaten already.

"Did you think she was going to eat before us?" exclaimed Domitila in a sudden burst of anger. "You have some strange ideas! Do you expect me to be a servant to my servants? Not me! She's already grown up, and if she's hungry let her fry herself a couple of eggs. Who cooks for me? Nobody, isn't that so? I . . . well, I'm as good as she any time!"

The miller did not reply, and with an absent expression, his chin on his chest and his arms crossed at his back, he began to walk back and forth across the kitchen. The desire to remain alone with Agueda surged violently in his mind, and was like a live coal in his throat. The noise made by Martin and his brothers when they got up almost simultaneously from the table, brought him out of his brooding.

"Are you going already?" he inquired, stopping.

They answered obediently.

"If we may. We were going to the bullfight. . . ."

Santoyo called to his wife.

"What are you doing? Aren't you going too?"

"I?" exclaimed the little woman, making a sign of the cross. "Do you think I'm going to town now? . . . No, thanks! I'm quite all right here . . . I don't need your suggestions."

"Your duty," replied Santoyo, "is to obey without a

word. I have asked you to get dressed, and you will. Then, if you prefer to remain with Marta, rather than go to the fight, that's up to you. . . . Meanwhile you do as you are told. And be quick too . . . the boys are waiting. . . ."

"But listen here!"

"I want you to enjoy yourself!"

Obedient to the domineering voice of her master, which snapped like a lash, Domitila bent her head, and a few minutes later reappeared in her black Sunday dress. The silk kerchief, also black, which covered her shoulders, accentuated the whiteness of her straight hair and the hooked profile of her face.

"Aren't you coming?" she asked humbly.

"I'll be along later," replied the miller.

And then, addressing himself to Martin, "Leave your mother at Marta's, do you hear? And we'll all meet later at the square."

He accompanied them to the door. Domitila walked with agile steps behind her three sons, all taller than herself. The four walked fairly fast, and soon their lean figures became smaller on the dusty, uneven road. Manuel Santoyo followed them with his eyes, and when he considered them sufficiently far off, rapidly, with one leap, re-entered the mill and closed the door.

"Agueda!" he shouted.

The girl appeared, timid and solicitous.

"What do you want?" she asked.

"I want you to have your lunch."

"All right, sir, as soon as I am done with the ironing. There isn't much left."

"Leave what you are doing for later. There's no hurry. Eat now. The mistress said you were to fry a couple of eggs for yourself."

Agueda looked about her with an inquiring look, and perceived the deep silence that filled the mill.

"What, has Señora Domitila gone out?"

"Not long ago. She went to the bullfight with Martin, Matias, and Mateo. She told me you were here. I thought you were in town, with my brother."

"No, sir. Señor Leandro wanted to take me along. But since my hand hurts me a lot yet, I refused."

She was very pale; with the sharp pain she had suffered, her nose and face had become leaner, and her black, mystical eyes had become larger. Her left arm, bandaged to the elbow, added to her pathetic appearance, almost that of a child. Seeing her in this attitude, pale, with her Jewish profile, her thin neck, and her head bowed towards the ground, an observer would have said that only a religious faith, several centuries old, could have modelled a beauty like hers.

"Then there is no one in the house?" she asked.

"No one but you and me."

Standing in front of the fireplace, the girl felt constrained. She could perceive in Santoyo's attitude something unusual, a repressed something which seemed to envelop her threateningly. Without any conscious reason for it, she began to feel a nervous fear, which stiffened her muscles and made her teeth chatter. Without knowing exactly why, she suddenly remembered "Mil Reales." She had seen his corpse stretched full length on the ground, when the master still had one of his heels on its neck. She remembered the fierceness with which a few days ago the miller had punished his son; and these memories froze her blood. How could she defend herself from him if he attacked her? Sanguinary, irresistible, that man was perdition, he was the hungry wolf which makes its kill on the highway. She had the impulse to make the sign of the cross and say a prayer which she had been taught to forestall the Evil Spirit.

"He is the Devil," she thought.

And quickly, under her apron, with the index finger and thumb of her right hand, she made the sign of the cross.

There was a silence. Manuel Santoyo, breathing heavily, approached her. With his elastic, silent stride, he seemed a

stalking tiger. Agueda took a few steps towards the door of the back yard.

"Where are you going?" he asked.

"I am going to finish the ironing."

She lied. Her purpose was to flee. Without a word, in a sudden swift dash, Manuel took her by one arm. The girl gasped and felt her weak knees bending. In her flesh, the cutting fingers of the master sank hard, like the sharp claws of a paw, and she thought they reached the bone. It wasn't the torture, however, that terrified her, but her guess of the master's intentions, which for her meant dishonour, damnation and the contempt of everyone, an excommunication which denies even shelter. Though innocent, she was well aware of the pain and humiliation that go with the tribute which maidens, including those who lose their maidenhood against their will, usually pay to free love.

To conceal her terror, she murmured, pretending calmness:

"Well, if you say so, I'll have my dinner!"

Santoyo circled her waist and brought her to him with a grip so passionate that when she bent away from him she felt her waist was breaking under the pressure. Quickly the face of her aggressor had turned from livid to red; and in that ruddy mask his honey-coloured eyes and his almost white eyebrows acquired a fierce, hypnotic power. His breathing became a powerful panting, and under the skin his veins thumped full of blood and turned blue.

Agueda, her head falling backwards, her eyes bulging, fixed, aghast, cried weakly:

"Leave me be, please leave me be!"

Instinctively she tried to repel him, beating him on the face, but she did it with her injured hand, and the pain she experienced was so great that she was on the point of fainting.

She cried out, and felt her sight go from her.

"Mama . . ." she cried, yielding, "ma . . . ma!"

Her will was dying. The violator gave her a few brutal kisses, and in the manner of a cock holding fast to a hen to mount her, bit her on the mouth with such frenzy that the wound he gave her would never be effaced. And holding her in this manner, his teeth fastened to her lips, he tumbled her to the ground and savagely enjoyed her, quaffing gloriously of that very sweet drink which briefly quenches all thirst. Agueda did not defend herself. The blow that she received on the back of her head had snuffed out her consciousness.

When this cowardly outrage was consummated, Manuel Santoyo pulled his victim up and made her sit down, and with several blows on her cheeks, shaking her by the shoulders, managed to bring her back to consciousness.

"Here, you, listen! . . . Do you hear what I'm telling you? Wake up!"

In his voice, still choked by breathlessness, there was anger, impatience, disdain, pride, carnal delight—everything but pity.

"Wake up!" he repeated. "Quick, wake up, do you hear me? I'm going. . . ."

The girl, not yet able to get up, opened her eyes very wide, as if she were peering from a great depth. She understood, looked at her aggressor, and lowering her humble head, began to cry. Her tears fell one by one over her broken hand and mixed with the blood of her lips.

Seeing her recovered, the criminal did not wait any longer, and alarmed and exuberant at the same time, took his jacket, threw it on his shoulder, and with quick strides escaped from the mill towards the town. Soon calm returned to his heart and he began to feel happy. Besides the sexual feat he had accomplished, that violation was a kind of a revenge he took on his brother, since the latter loved Agueda like a daughter.

"If he only knew," he thought.

And his mouth smiled cruelly at this shameless reflection.

He was reaching the first houses of the town when he

passed Cayetano, his nephew. The youth, who did not expect such an encounter, became slightly disturbed. However he spoke first:

"Where are you going, uncle?"

"To the bullfight. Has it started already?"

"Not yet. We shall see each other soon in the ring."

"We'll all be there."

"I'm going to get a friend. . . ."

Santoyo suspected his nephew was lying, because he did not think it possible that he should have an appointment with anyone outside of the town, and much less a few moments before the fight was to begin. He did not want, however, to become entangled in long explanations.

"I'll see you later then," he said, going on.

"Later then, uncle."

The boy continued on his way very calmly; then he stopped, as if to light a cigarette, looked backwards with dissimulation, and when he was certain the miller could no longer see him, started to run. In fact, Cayetano Rionda was bound for the mill, since he meant to keep his word faithfully and cut the rose bush. Had he not bound himself to do so, on his honour?

When he entered the porticoes of the market-place, Manuel saw Paco Camacho leaning against a pillar. Quickly he thought: "In case Agueda should tell what happened, it would be better to get this fool into the affair." Thinking it an excellent way to prove his alibi, he greeted the inventor.

"I'm very glad to see you. Did you meet my brother?"

"No. . . ."

"I know that he wants to talk to you about something. My wife told me, because we barely speak to each other. It seems that he intends to install some machines for a business he has in mind. It may mean money for you. . . . Why don't you go to the house and look him up?"

The inventor of the "dish-tipper" brightened up.

"Do you think he'll be home?"

"I'm pretty sure. I left him there. You have plenty of time to go and come back; there's an hour yet before the fight."

Camacho agreed with the miller. Besides, the fact that here, in Carrascal del Horcajo, where no one had ever taken him seriously, some one should want to consult him and associate with him in business so unhinged his nervous system that his hands began to shake. He swelled with pride, and a discreet blush coloured his cheeks.

"I shall follow your advice," he exclaimed; "I'll look for Leandro this very minute. You know me. You know my only pleasure is work."

He did as he promised, and started immediately for the mill. When he was approaching the end of his walk he met Cayetano Rionda, who seemingly was leaving the mill.

"What are you after around here?" asked the youth, surprised.

"Your uncle Leandro."

"He's not around. What's more, I don't believe there is anyone in the house."

"Well, he must be in, because his brother told me so, don't you know."

"I saw Manuel not long ago."

"So did I, and he told me, 'Leandro needs you for urgent business; go and get him at the mill.' "

Cayetano hesitated. He had had dinner in his own house, and Leandro and his family had been there too. But it was possible that his uncle, not much interested in the bullfight, might have returned to the mill.

"He may be in. The truth is, I haven't been inside the house at all," said the young man, shrugging his shoulders.

Briskly he continued on his way.

Paco Camacho crossed the porch without noticing the ruined rose bush, which the vengeful hand of Cayetano had cut level with the earth, and opened the door.

"Is anyone at home?"

Obtaining no answer, he advanced through the hall and arrived at the kitchen, where he was surprised to find Agueda, kneeling on the ground, in an attitude of prayer, with her eyes red and her lips cut and stained with blood.

Barral's brother-in-law stopped, perplexed and full of pity.

"What is the matter?" he exclaimed. "Have you fallen down?"

The girl did not answer or move, and though she was looking at him, she did not seem to recognize him. On her wounded hand, under whose bandage the tragic absence of the fingers could be clearly seen, there was blood also.

Camacho could hear her muttering between her teeth:

"Mama . . . mama. . . ."

This dull moan moved the inventor, who was no doubt impressed by that impulse—a kind of regression to childhood —which makes even the oldest of men in moments of greatest suffering, turned into children by pain, remember their mother and beg her for help.

"Are you sick? . . . Have you fallen down? . . ." insisted Camacho.

He approached her and tried to help her get up, but the girl made a gesture of terror and defence, and dragging herself on her haunches, seemingly in search of refuge, huddled against the wall. She could not understand the presence of the inventor, and looked at him in shame and trembling, suspecting that he already knew of her disgrace, and wanted to take possession of what Manuel's outrage had, indirectly, placed at the mercy of all men.

"Where is Leandro?" asked Camacho.

Without losing her distrustful attitude, her feet under her skirt, her arms crossed over her breasts, her anguished face upturned with the beaten expression of a punished animal, Agueda took some time before she could answer:

"Señor Leandro is not in."

"How is that?" replied Paco Camacho angrily. "Impossible. You must be mistaken. He must be in the fields and

you don't know it. Only a few minutes ago his brother assured me I could find him here."

Realizing the peaceful intentions which brought the inventor, Agueda was more explicit.

"Señor Leandro," she said, "left the house this morning early. He and the family went to Señora Irene's for dinner."

Comically indignant—the inventor of the "dish-tipper," simple of spirit and badly put together in body, could not become indignant in any other way—shouted and stamped his feet:

"What a fool I've been! He was making fun of me!"

He went towards the water jar and drank a glass of water. The anger which moved him had made his mouth dry.

"Can you tell me what has happened to you?" he asked, calming down.

Agueda kept silent.

"What is the mater with your mouth? A blow? Poor girl! A blow, isn't it? Did you fall?"

The girl did not answer or make a gesture either of assent or of denial.

"Perhaps Señor Manuel has given you a blow? . . . That must have been it. . . . What a brute! . . . Tell me, is that it?"

Agueda's silence finally exasperated him.

"You don't want to talk? . . . Well, that's your own bad luck! Why should I take any interest in your business? Stay there if you like . . . and the devil take you. You're so stupid you deserve a good beating."

And furious, his fists clenched, banging the door behind him, he disappeared.

Back in town he looked for Manuel Santoyo, whom he found in the company of his son-in-law, in front of the hardware store. Taking the miller aside, he explained how he had not been able to see Leandro, and what Agueda had said.

"I'll be hanged! I can't understand it!" the miller answered as if greatly surprised. "But perhaps he left without my seeing him. What I'm sorry for is that you took such a long walk for nothing. I am very sorry! I hope you won't mind it."

And he added cunningly:

"Let me warn you, when you meet my brother, not to tell him anything about his project. Wait for him to speak to you first, because I don't want him to think, since we're not on speaking terms with each other, that I'm worrying about his business."

Paco Camacho did not need so many explanations to calm him down. Wishes as well as memories faded soon from his mind. Saying good-bye to Santoyo he went to the chemist's, where he expected to find his sister, Andromaca, and Julieta waiting for him to go to the bullfight.

A half hour before the fight started, the ring, in which one more spectator could not have found place, offered with its golden arena, its paling painted yellow, and its benches spotted with red, black, green and white blotches, the passionate colourfulness of a mosaic. Behind, and above the highest benches, the severe balconies of the market-place could be seen filled with people under bright sunshades and bathed in a magnificent wave of sunlight. In the official box, situated over the gangway to the arena, and provided with a hanging from the railing down, to protect the women from the glances of the men below, gathered Don Bernardo, the mayor, who was to signal with his handkerchief the different phases of the fight: "The Flower Pot," as his plump wife was called, aflame in the strident showiness of a burning Manila shawl; Don Isidro Perez Cadenas, with Doña Gerarda and their daughter; "Don Profundo," lean, serious, black-clad, his hands mittened; Don Cirilo, the priest, and Don Lotario. Below, in the doorway, "Panduro" the matador had placed his men and four members of the Civil Guard. Drunk with gaiety, the rough and cruel crowd applauded,

roared, jeered, shouted, whistled, and stamped its feet. The spectacle had not yet begun, but the vast amphitheatre seemed already to reek with blood. The noise was deafening, colours dazzled, mouths became parched in that warm, dusty air. Suddenly the musicians started a two-step, announcing the appearance of the first bull. It was exactly five o'clock. And at that moment of greatest emotional tension, by virtue of a subtle connection of racial ideas, the red and yellow flag, waving from the little tower crowning the face of the town hall, looked like a great "Viva España!" written on the blue.

Shortly after the fight began Martin Santoyo, who had not ceased to examine the benches nervously, became convinced that Cayetano Rionda was not in the crowd. Certain of this, he was shaken with a mixture of fear and burning ire. His brothers, annoyed to see him so aloof from what was going on, tried to awaken his interest.

"What are you thinking of?" exclaimed Matias, poking him in the ribs. "Open your eyes, will you! Look ahead of you!"

"I'm thinking," he muttered, "that my cousin is going to be my damnation."

"Why?"

"Because he hasn't arrived yet. He's going to keep his word, I'm sure of it. And if he cuts my rose bush . . . I swore it! . . . I'll eat his tongue."

Matias was about to reply, but the increasing excitement of the spectacle demanded his attention. The bull was giving proof of extraordinary power, and had thrown "Panduro" most spectacularly. At the moment, the matador was getting up from the ground, limping, his trousers torn to ribbons. The rumble of a storm filled the bowl. The public jeered at the man, and with unerring precision vegetables began to rain on him. From the paling, the men showered him with curses, and brandished their ash clubs. They thought him cowardly rather than unskilful, and fear is the

only thing that cannot be excused in the bull ring. Many shouted like angry tigers:

"When you come out we'll give you a beating! . . ."

The bullock, clumsily handled, and too large an animal for such poor fighters, had taken possession of the ring, and looked at the crowd challengingly. The frightened performers would not leave the safety of the paling even at the risk of being beaten by the crowd. The deafening roar of shouts and jeering tore the air. Yet in obedience to a signal from the president, in the midst of the hostile evironment, the unhappy "Panduro," pale, half-stripped, unsteady on his legs, petrified by fright, came out to kill. His pitiful appearance exasperated the multitude further. The jeering increased.

"Coward! . . . Yellow! . . . Milksop! . . . We hope to God the bull gets you!"

"Panduro's" work was shamefully poor. The unhappy man could not use either the muleta or the sword, and when he approached the bull he did it so that the animal could not see him. He seemed ready to collapse, and an orange which hit him on the neck, scaring him more than it hurt him, knocked him to his knees. The public burst out laughing. The expert matador had turned clown. The first warning sounded. "Panduro" got up, went straight towards the bull, and, closing his eyes, sank his sword into the animal through the fore thigh. Immediately afterwards, treacherously, he sank it again in the belly. The tortured animal began to rear. Without using the muleta, the swordsman jabbed him twice more, without success. The sword would not go in, and Panduro must have thought that the animal was made of stone. The second warning sounded. Wounded on the head with a stone, and with his clothes stained with mud and blood, the unhappy fighter went towards his enemy, and lunging forward he wounded it again. Suddenly the public, as if in obedience to an order, rose as one man; many of the men, jumping from bench to bench, finally reached the paling, cleared it, and while some of them attacked the fighter,

others threw themselves against the animal, holding it by the tail and horns and legs, and finished it with their knives. The opportune intervention of the Civil Guard prevented them from dealing "Panduro" the same fate. This over, the crowd considered themselves sufficiently well revenged and a trumpet call announcing the continuation of the spectacle cleared the ring.

Striking him on the knee, Martin Santoyo attracted the attention of his brother.

"See there," he said. "There's Cayetano, he's coming in now. . . ."

In fact, on the other side of the ring, Rionda, still standing, was trying to sit down next to the sons of Hernandez Halcon. After a few minutes Martin added:

"He's come from the mill, I'm sure. . . ."

"How do you know?"

"My heart tells me so. I'm sure he was at the mill and cut the rose bush. I'd risk the salvation of my soul on that!"

To relieve him, though he was not certain of what he was saying, his brother said:

"I don't think so. Cayetano likes to boast, and to pretend he's brave. But that's as far as he'll go."

The second bull was coming into the ring when Martin, no longer capable of restraining the desire which dominated him, made up his mind to leave. He whispered:

"I'll be right back."

Worried about his brother, Mateo asked Matias not to let him go.

"What do you expect me to do?" grumbled the latter in bad humour. "Anything I can say I've already told him. Now it's up to him whatever he does!"

Martin repeated in a low voice:

"I'll be right back. Before the fight is over I'll be here."

Breaking his way laboriously through the crowd, from bench to bench, he arrived at the paling and from there made

his way under the stands to the street. A fierce and desolate pain—a pain which was sadness, jealousy, and desire for revenge—oppressed his breast. Unable to control himself, forced by something superior to his will, he started running towards his house. He could remember word for word the threats which Cayetano Rionda had thrown at him, and the petulant smile and the boasting gesture with which he had emphasized them. He seemed to be facing his cousin and his wolfish eyes narrowed with hatred.

"Could he have dared?" he thought. "God forbid! . . . God forbid!"

At the mere thought, he involuntarily gnashed his small white teeth.

When he arrived at the mill, his anguish increased in such wise that he felt his heart splitting within him, and he had to stop for breath. Some thirty feet separated him from the porch, still filled with sunlight. Not wanting to make a mistake, in order the better to see, he rubbed his eyes with both hands and in spite of himself the flowers of the bush seemed pale and its branches less green. A deep, interior chill went through his soul. Stooping forward, he stumbled towards the rose bush and made certain that the trunk had been cut. It was a corpse that confronted him.

"He killed it!" he muttered. "He killed it!"

On his knees, as if before a tomb, his hands felt softly the moist edges of the wound, and he thought that the dying plant was grateful for his tender caresses. Silently he bade it farewell. It was impossible to bring it to life again. The cowardly crime was done. The emerald leaves and the fragrant flowers he had offered the Virgin would soon be dust. For a long time Martin Santoyo remained on his knees, bent down under the weight of his anguish. That plant which at the cost of endless worry and untiring care he had wrested from the earth, to the earth was returning. His brain became clouded. "How can I bear never to see it again! . . ." he said to himself. And this slow, desolate

brooding seemed to diffuse itself monotonously throughout the dead rose bush like a prayer.

After a few moments he got up, and the desire for revenge suddenly wiped all the pain from his heart. A black pain which is avenged is covered with white and turns finally into exquisite pleasure. Cayetano Rionda had just destroyed what Martin most loved, but the shameful outrage would not remain unpunished. The reprisal he would take would be frightful. Nothing would intimidate him, would make him desist, would move him to pity. What his cousin did would be paid for with blood. Such was his desire. But above and beyond his desire stood the oath he had taken.

Impassive, cold, filled with that imposing calm which follows all extreme resolutions, the youth entered his house. He would need his knife, which by chance he did not have with him.

Crossing the kitchen, on his way to the stairs, he saw Agueda squatting on the floor against the fireplace.

"You here?" he asked, surprised.

She did not answer, and her eyes, open wider than ever, observed the newcomer intently and with fear.

"I thought you were in town with my uncle," Martin added.

Agueda remained silent. Her face had the dullness, the absence of expression, of condemned men entering the death chamber. A crown of poisoned thorns right on her head would not have pained her more. The traditional and barbaric idea that woman carries her honour in her virginity crazed her. In an instant all her little ambitions had been broken to pieces. She felt reviled and exposed to the brutal appetite of every man. In the future no one would take her as a wife, no one would defend her, and her children, should she ever have any, would be ashamed of her. Leandro himself, as soon as he found out that she had fallen, would throw her out into the street, without stopping to think that it was not her fault. She was not worthy of

kissing Maria any longer, or of looking Señora Domitila in the face. She had shamed the home of those who so generously sheltered her. She was covered with mud, lost, damned, and even lepers would avoid her. For her there could be neither forgiveness nor refuge. She was condemned to flee from the town and beg on the highroads.

This obsession, lashing her soul, gave her eyes an idiotic stare.

"What is the matter with you?" asked Martin, aroused to curiosity. "There must be something the matter with you. . . . What's that wound on your mouth?"

Obtaining no answer to his questions he went up to his room, took his knife, and looked about him. He felt as if this was the last time he would ever look at these things. He returned to the kitchen. The obstinate muteness of the girl, her attitude of despair, and the desolation in which he found her, gave rise to the suspicion that on his way to cut the rose bush, Cayetano might have violated her.

"Listen," he said, "after my brothers and I went away, who came around here? . . . Will you answer me?"

Shuddering, as if she were suddenly coming to, the girl answered:

"Señor Camacho."

"Señor Camacho?" replied Martin in amazement. "What did he come for?"

"He asked for Señor Leandro. But when I told him he wasn't here he went away."

Martin Santoyo meditated a few minutes. He could not understand the unusual visit of the inventor. This contributed to the entanglement of his thoughts.

"Who else came?" he continued.

"Nobody."

"Are you quite sure?"

"As far as I know, nobody."

"Did you go out into the fields this afternoon?"

"No."

This emphatic declaration dispelled his first conjectures about Cayetano. It was certain that the latter, once he had performed his outrage, had returned to town without entering the mill.

"And father?" he asked.

Agueda broke down, and her lips began to tremble.

"Did he take long before he left?"

The girl made a negative gesture. She covered her face with her hands, and broke into sobs.

"Well!" exclaimed Martin, more baffled yet. "What is the matter now? Won't you talk?"

Softly, he put his hand on her shoulder.

"Did father beat you up?"

Agueda, still on her knees, her head deep on her chest, increased her weeping.

Martin repeated:

"He beat you up, didn't he?"

Suddenly he guessed the truth, the whole filthy truth, and his chaste soul vibrated with horror.

"He raped her!" he thought.

Now he understood the hungry expression with which his father had often looked at the girl in the fields.

"To take her," he said to himself, "he forced mother to go to town with us. He wanted her, and forced her by beating her. That blood on her lips is his doing."

For a long time they remained silent, she crying and he, his head bowed, his arms crossed, deeply sunk in thought. On another occasion he would have felt an intense contempt for the violated girl, a kind of hatred and repugnance. But now he could understand her pain and pardoned her, because something within him told him that very soon he would be equally unhappy. In the silence Martin Santoyo's voice vibrated with a moving, sweet and tender emotion which Agueda had never before heard.

"I am going . . . do you hear me? . . . I'm going. Don't you want to say good-bye to me?"

Agueda did not move. She remained with her face in her arms, prone on the floor, in the attitude of a hired mourner.

"Say good-bye to me, woman," insisted Martin; "we may not see each other again."

She looked at him alarmed.

"Are you going?"

"Yes."

"From the town?"

"Perhaps."

"Are you going to America?"

Suddenly she felt that she loved him, and looking at him so sad, so tender, so different from his usual manner, she was on the point of embracing his knees and begging protection of him.

"I don't know yet what will happen to me," he replied. "In any case, if we see each other again, we'll not be able to talk, because there will be people around."

He looked all around him, coughed, scratched his head.

"What do you want? . . . Now that I see you like this . . . Well, I don't know . . . I'm sorry for you. That's the way. . . . Perhaps I was in love with you, and didn't know it! . . ."

Speaking in this manner, distractedly, he bent over Agueda, kissed her hair, and left the mill.

XII

"I'LL eat Cayetano's tongue," Martin was saying as he walked along. "If I have to kill him to cut it out, I'll kill him."

He felt a changed person, as if a new man, utterly unknown to him, had suddenly begun to live within his body. If that morning when he got up some one had asked him what he expected of the future, he would not have known how to answer definitely, for he did not even have a sweetheart. Now, however, he could easily read his future, and was certain that his life, however long it was destined to be, could be told in half a dozen words! His destiny was brief and inexorably cut out for him. He would kill Rionda, and would go to jail for it, perhaps be hanged. The road of blood and shame he faced horrified him, but he understood only too well that he was advancing along it already, and that it was impossible to turn back.

"I have sworn it," he thought.

And oaths, as soon as pronounced, mount up to Heaven, flower about the throne of the Lord, and constantly renewing themselves make a stool on which He rests His feet.

In Martin's narrow and fanatical brain sprang up, incoherent and confused, some of the episodes of the Sacred History which years ago Don Lotario had pounded into his memory with curses and blows of the ferule.

Of the little Bible history he remembered, nothing obsessed him so much as the blind obedience of Abraham, when

in compliance with the Divine Will he prepared to sacrifice Isaac. He conceived of an oath as a strong chain riveted to the neck of the soul, a chain of perdition, of damnation, which will not break loose until one has fulfilled what one has sworn. And if Abraham, sacrificing his only son on the pyre was not committing the most execrable of crimes but on the contrary was performing the loftiest of actions, pleasing in every way to the eyes of the Lord, why then should he not make every effort to follow the Patriarch's example, all the more when the person whom, with the most solemn of oaths, he had promised to sacrifice was not even his brother?

Imprisoned in this narrow circle, the spirit of the brooding youth lost its sanity. In vain did he seek an escape from the obligation of keeping his promise. He could find none. It was impossible to break those ties which held him bound for ever. It was impossible to retract. There was no escape from the abyss into which a momentary fit of anger had cast him. His oath paralysed and vanquished him, and dragged him downward. It was like those lead weights which are tied to the feet of corpses thrown into the sea, to keep them from floating.

"I have sworn it!" he repeated to himself: "I have sworn it!"

This conviction, growing stronger every minute, was reinforced by what he remembered as "the first of all the commandments:" "Thou shalt love the Lord, thy God with all thy heart" and likewise the second commandment of the Decalogue: "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain" . . . Though he was not at all acquainted with psychoanalysis, he understood that if he vacillated so much in accomplishing what he had sworn to do, it was through fear of human justice, a fear that derived from his egoism, that is to say, from the fact that secretly he loved himself more than he loved God. This he judged to be monstrous. Repenting of his doubts, he began to tremble.

If God, omniscient and omnipresent, should deign to look into his conscience now, full as it was of cowardice, fear, and darkness, what would He think?

"Forgive me, Lord!" muttered the wretched man; "the love I was taught to bear Thee will guide my life and will be the greatest love my heart shall harbour. Hear me, O Lord! . . . Forgive me! . . . Look into my soul, and see that I am not lying. I shall know how to sacrifice myself for Thee. I offer Thee my freedom, O Lord, and if necessary, my throat too! . . ."

The second of the Commandments bound him, tied him more securely yet. He would say to himself: "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain." He had sworn, and oaths, according to the Mosaic code dictated by the fierce God of Sinai, must not be allowed to fall in the void. To perjure oneself is to condemn oneself, to throw oneself headlong into the blazing fires of Hell for centuries and centuries. God flings into the fire those who dare to mock Him and, converting them into flaming torches, lets them burn eternally without consuming themselves.

This primitive conception of Hell which he had further impressed on him from contemplating an old picture of the "Condemned Souls" which hung somewhere in the mill, consoled him and gave him strength. Suddenly he felt himself his own master, and when he ceased his meditations, his soul filled with quiet became clear and transparent as a sleeping lake. To save his soul he would lose his body. His liberty or his life—what human justice should want to snatch from him—he dedicated from that moment to God, his true Father. In the revenge he was going to inflict on the person of his cousin, there was more devotion than rancour, and for that reason he offered it to the Supreme Being.

"I don't care at all if they lock me up, or kill me," he argued with himself, "if He accepts my sacrifice."

Submerged in these dark cogitations, he came into the town just after the bullfight was over, and the public had

begun to disperse noisily. In the porticoes he spied his father, who was at the door of the hardware store, and in order not to greet him, he took the long way across the market. He also saw his brothers, whom he evaded by hiding carefully behind a pillar. He was on the trail of Cayetano, and was worried that he had not yet caught sight of him. Walking about the stalls, badly lit by smoky lamps, he passed through a group of young men who were waiting for the dance to begin, and finally arrived at the chemist's. At the door, Otello was smoking a cigarette.

"Did you see my cousin?" asked Martin without approaching him.

The taciturn attitude and the unusual sallowness of the young miller awakened young Barral's curiosity. He had an uneasy presentiment.

"What do you want him for?"

"I asked you," insisted Martin, with that dry expression of his which enabled him to speak while barely moving his lips, "whether you have seen my cousin."

"He must be at the inn. Would you like me to go along?"

"No, thanks."

Martin did indeed find his cousin at the entrance of the café, talking with Paco Camacho and the doctor's sons. The vehemence of Rionda's conversation and the clumsiness of his gestures indicated that he must have been drinking. Coldly, and silently, his arms crossed at his back, Martin approached the group.

"Good evening!"

His arrival seemed to shock them all; they looked at him inquiringly; a short silence followed.

"Did you want anything?" asked Cayetano at last, taking a step towards him, challengingly.

"I want a few words with you in private."

Together they walked towards the square.

"What do you want with me?" asked Rionda.

Martin Santoyo looked at him for a few seconds without moving a muscle of his livid face. Then he said:

"You kept your word and cut down my rose bush, and now I come to keep my oath and cut out your tongue."

"Are you in a hurry?"

"I am."

"Well, you'll have to wait, because I have to go home for supper. After that I may go to the dance."

"So long as we can settle this matter sometime tonight."

"At twelve, if you like."

"Any time is good enough for me."

They looked at each other with rancour. The words which they had spoken had stirred their blood.

"Where shall we meet?" inquired Rionda.

"At the cemetery gate."

"That suits me."

He made as if to go, but turned back.

"Shall I bring my knife along with me?"

Briefly and honourably, incapable of treachery, Martin Santoyo answered:

"You had better."

Without looking at each other, both turned and departed.

Trying to avoid meeting anyone he knew, Martin left the square, and walking along the dark streets which cut their way among the back yards and the one-storied houses, he finally came to the outskirts of the town, on an elevated esplanade at the top of a slope, where he could dimly see the mill, almost effaced now behind the tenuous grey silky mist of the evening. He was calm. The affair in which he was engaged produced in him no emotion. He had no fear, or anger, or impatience to be over the difficult straits he found himself in. He was waiting, that was all. The fatalism of his race infused him with equanimity. His heart beat rhythmically, without uneasiness, like a balance at rest.

The moon came out at dusk, in a sky magnificently spangled with stars. Its cool light shed a thin silvery dew

on the earth. The cypresses of the graveyard grew black and here and there the walls of the orchards gleamed white. In the distance, along the road which stretched from the town to the mill, he saw a group of people walking.

"My folks returning home," he thought.

Then he thought of Agueda, and remembering the deathly pallor of her face, the beaten expression of her eyes, the shining blackness of her hair and above all the state of supreme affliction in which he had left her that afternoon, he was reminded of Our Lady of Sorrows. This idea flitted through his mind and caused within him a sweet new stirring, such as he had never known before. He sighed deeply.

When he heard ten o'clock strike he jumped up and returned to town. Almost feeling his way, he entered it through the outer streets. All the dwellings were closed and dark. Above the fence of a yard a cow thrust out its head to look at him.

He was crossing the square of Saint Martin when, mechanically approaching the church, he noticed with the greatest surprise and the happiest excitement that its door was open. "A miracle," was his immediate conclusion. Whether it was open because God knew that Martin Santoyo was going to pass by, or because the sexton—an ancient and venerable drunkard—had forgotten to close it, the fact remained that Martin Santoyo was able to open it with the slightest push of his fingers.

The building consisted of only one nave, of very poor appearance. The flooring was of brick, and the roof which the poverty of the parishioners had not been able to build into a vault, rested on four large main beams stretched across the width of the building on a grey extension of the walls. The odour of sweat and incense still hung heavy in the damp air. Guided by a very small oil light, Santoyo approached the altar and piously knelt before the image of the Holy Virgin. His arms crossed on his chest, his head bowed towards the earth in a gesture of humility, he prayed.

And he did it with such intense fervour that he heard the words of his prayer resound one by one within himself. He then raised his head, and fixed his eyes on the holy image whose face was animated by the flickering rays of the lamp. He spoke to her with intense emotion; and in simple, earthy words, incoherent and moving, a passionate, barbaric, primitive torrent flowed from his breast.

"Señora," he prayed, "do not forsake me in the danger that threatens me. You know that the best flowers of my rose bush were for you . . . to lay at your holy feet. Help me now to take revenge on the man who cut your rose bush down, and who has offended you. I do not like to harm my cousin, but I swore to punish him in the name of God, our Lord, and now I can't back out. Please, Señora, intercede for me, that the Lord may be with me . . . and if I have to die, let my agony be brief. But if it is I who survive, let the men who will be my judges not be too cruel with me. Señora! . . . You saw me born. You know how I love work and the respect I have for my parents. You know I have never stolen, or told a lie, or raised calumny, or desired my neighbour's wife . . . You, Lady, who read my heart, and know that if I am going to fight with Cayetano it is not because I hate him, but because I love you and God . . . do not forsake me in this terrible hour! . . ."

Like so many other pious persons, Martin Santoyo would never have dared to address himself to the Supreme Being in these terms. For the God of the mystic painters, with his long white beard and his righteous brow, he felt terror. But not so for the Virgin, so beautiful and young and sweet and sad. The Virgin, because she was a woman, would pardon easily, and if God represented inexorable righteousness, she, who had suffered so much, symbolized infinite forgiveness. In the Virgin Martin Santoyo saw a mother; she was a sort of continuation of Señora Domitila, and for that reason he was not afraid of speaking to her.

As soon as he finished his prayer the miller got up from

the ground, where he had knelt for more than an hour, took the scapulary wherein years ago he had enclosed a flower from his rosebush, kissed it, and approaching the altar, offered it to his Protectress.

"Keep it," he said. "If I am not killed, some day, no matter how far away I am, I shall come back for it."

With the hope of coming back some day, he quickly recovered his spirits and left the church.

The dance had ended, and the town, deserted and silent as though fatigued by the excitement of the day, seemed to be filled with moonlight. A subtle and silvery night-dew polished the cobblestones of the narrow streets, turned the eaves into steel, gave depth to the black rectangle of the doors, and cut clearly the shadows cast by the balconies onto the fronts of the houses. In the dwellings, and in the yards which separated one house from another, man and beast slumbered. At long intervals, on the commons, a dog would bark. Then silence . . . under the cold of the infinite scarf which the stars were weaving, silence. Soon it would be twelve o'clock.

Martin Santoyo crossed the market-place, where the visiting venders wrapped in their cloaks were sleeping under the shelter of their counters, entered the darkness of the porticoes, proceeded down the pavement on which the moon drew the graceful curve of the arches, and following the slippery downward grade of a narrow street, and then descending some steps, he left the town, unseen by anyone. Around him, like invisible companions, went his thoughts, which now and then were silent but again would begin to talk loudly amongst themselves. Santoyo's monologue, accompanied by the rhythm of his steps, had the monotony of prayer.

"Lord," he said as he walked, "if I am going to do this it's for your sake . . . because I gave my oath. Lead me by the hand, Lord! . . ."

For ten minutes he walked along a path opened between

two steep declivities in which the carts had cut deep ruts. When he came out of this path he crossed the bridge spanning the Vaquerizo, and turning to his right, began the climb to the graveyard. Over that road which so many men had taken never to return, the cypresses dropped their conic shadows.

In front of the wide gate of the graveyard, the ground had been levelled into a small square. Martin looked around him. He was alone.

"I am first," he thought.

Slightly fatigued by the climb, he dropped limply onto a stone which served as a bench. With his elbows on his knees and his chin in his hands, he sat quietly. The duel which was so soon to take place began to worry him, and his passionate heart quickened its beat, not from fear, but from a vehement and to him unknown restlessness. At his feet, far away, down below, the plain, sparsely illuminated, seemed an immense confused lake bounded on one side by the Mount of Fatigue and Stark Mound, and on the other by the height on which the town was situated. From that dark blot there shone the lights which Don Diosdado and Paulina lit every evening at dusk. Martin Santoyo attentively contemplated those two little lights which seemed to observe him curiously, as if aware of what was going to happen; and then, impatiently, he cast a glance towards the road by which he had ascended.

"In an hour," he meditated without a tremble, "either he or I will go down that road. Perhaps neither he nor I! Who can tell?"

The town clock was ringing twelve when he saw a man walking briskly up the hill. His figure, tall and loose-jointed, faded into the dense shadow of the cypresses and reappeared bathed in moonlight as it advanced.

"There he comes. . . ." Martin thought.

As soon as he recognized his cousin a sudden flame of hatred, a terrible hatred, kindled by his fanaticism, lapped his

heart and he sprang to his feet. Tall, rigid, with long arms and legs, Martin Santoyo was a reproduction of the small-headed, lean, and wiry figure of his father.

Cayetano called Martin's attention to the rigid punctuality with which he had kept his word.

"I'm not late!" he exclaimed. "It's twelve now. If you had to wait it was your own fault."

Martin did not answer, and with an impetuous gesture, he snatched rather than took his jacket off his shoulders. Cayetano did the same. Though he was five or six years younger than his cousin, he equalled him in size, and like him had a quick temper and an obstinate will.

"I'll eat his tongue," repeated Martin to himself, finding that this thought added fire to his hatred.

Without further word they stood face to face, their right arms thrust forward, their left defended by their jackets which served them as protecting shields in the fight. Their bodies were bent almost horizontal at the waist, and they crouched slightly, the better to leap. Such is the guard consecrated of old by the great knife fighters of Aragon and Castile. The moon, almost at its height, bathed them fully in the coolness of its light, and threw their shadows on the ground—small shadows which, stretched under the feet of the combatants, looked like fine-woven winding-sheets destined to receive the body of the vanquished.

Resolved to end it quickly, neither Cayetano nor Martin wasted energy in idle movements or words. With the blind fury of two cocks they sprang at each other, and from the first moment the fight reached its maximum intensity. The knives looked like spurs and their jackets were open like wings, that at intervals brushed the ground. Once clinched, they did not let go, until tripping, one of them had to give way, on account of the violence of the shock, and the other would follow inch by inch. Hatred is the lust for death, from whence derives that kind of salaciousness, that carnal joy with which men, coming together in hand-to-hand combat,

destroy themselves. The blows spur them on, kindle them, intoxicate them, and are to them what caresses are to lovers.

After a few minutes of intense duelling, Martin's and Cayetano's clothes were moist with blood. But since all the knife thrusts which sought the heart had been warded off, the wounds were not very deep, and the terrible contest went on, without respite or pity.

Notwithstanding his indomitable courage, Cayetano Rionda, less vigorous than his cousin, began to yield. Martin realized this, and with renewed rage pursued him, making him draw back, until he drove him against the door of the cemetery. The retreating man, however, still gave battle, and they fell into a desperate clinch in which Cayetano received several deep cuts, one of which reached his belly and felled him. Falling, his head banged against the door, as if, seeing death approach, he were summoning it. He remained face up, unconscious, his arms limp. Silent and livid, Martin Santoyo jumped on him. Thrusting his hands into Cayetano's mouth he drew out the tongue and cut it at the root, as the vanquished man, only a few hours before, had cut his rose bush.

His revenge accomplished, the criminal wrapped his bloody spoil in his handkerchief, and without exactly knowing where he was going, stumbled off.

Somewhat aimlessly, he recrossed the Vaquerizo, its narrow, quiet waters, polished by the light, looking from the bridge like an enormous sleeping reptile. He crossed the town and came out on the fields again. He was apprehensive. The violence of the fight had left him in a daze. He could not recognize himself, could not "find himself." And yet, he felt calm, filled with the profound and refreshing tranquillity which the performance of a high duty brings. He had sworn, and at the risk of his life he had fulfilled his oath. To perjure is worse than to kill, and of these two crimes he had had the courage to select the lesser.

"God," he was thinking, "must be satisfied with me now. . . ."

As his nerves calmed down, the pain of his wounds increased, and finally became intolerable. The cold, the chilling moisture of the early morning, and the state of fatigue resulting from the fight, added to the pain. He looked at his hands, saw that they were stained with blood, and suspected that his face was also stained. He then walked across the fields and, reaching the Guadalsazar, took his clothes off and carefully washed his wounds, more than ten in number. He gave special attention to those on his arms, which were the most painful. The cool water diminished the flow of blood and he felt better. Then he dressed again, and in a hollow of the ground at the foot of a clump of trees, he sought shelter. A few moments later he yielded to a deep and sweet stupor. The obsession of his oath which had haunted him so persistently during the course of that horrible evening had disappeared, and he began to feel happy once more, independent, master of himself, as if suddenly all his cares were at an end. His was the happy disposition of a man who, once his duties are fulfilled, folds his arms in peace. His conscience was at rest. The harm he had just inflicted was done in the name of God and deserved praise. What did he care about losing his body if he saved his soul? Nothing. To continue at liberty, as heretofore, or end his life in prison, was all the same to him.

That irrational desire of criminals to return to their homes, and there seek refuge, urged him to go back to the mill.

"Perhaps my parents, alarmed by my absence, are waiting up for me," he thought.

Then he said to himself that probably they thought he was with friends at the dance, and had gone to bed. This thought calmed him. One by one, softly, his worries and disquietude disappeared. Everything, even the wind, was silent around him. And in the immense darkness of the night, the monotonous lapping of the river, furbished into a steel plate by the moon, invited him to sleep. His fatigued heart

was quieted, his nerves relaxed, his lids closed. The instinct for preservation also left him. Why should he flee? It was better and more comfortable to let himself be taken, to give himself up to what was already fated. Had he not spoken with the Virgin, and did not God know that he was there? . . . Thus meditating, he fell asleep.

About daybreak he awoke, and no sooner had he opened his eyes than the memory of the horrible drama he had just lived through filled his mind with uncertainty. A rose light, infinitely gladdening, shone through the green foliage. The birds were singing, and the rumbling waters of the Guadalsazar seemed to roll faster than usual. In the distance, on the plain, there was the sound of voices, the ringing of cow bells, and the slow creaking of an approaching cart.

With one leap, Martin Santoyo was on his feet. His wounds hurt him extremely. He was in pain, stiff from fatigue and the damp chill. He swung his arms and rubbed his legs and knees vigorously to warm himself. As he became more fully awake, the desire to live welled up in his heart again, and a vehement impulse to hide, to run away, dominated him. However, before leaving he had to embrace his mother, ask her blessing, and bid her farewell in case he should never see her again. He wanted also to fulfil the whole horror of his oath. . . .

He examined the sky, where with surprising precision the eyes of the farmer can read the hour.

"Five o'clock," he thought. "Father must have left for the fields already."

With this certainty he started off and, following the shore of the river, arrived at the mill. The rose bush, green yet and still loaded with flaming flowers, seemed to be living. The sight of it wrenched a deep sigh from him. Again the vipers of homicidal anger hissed within him.

"The man who killed you," he said fiercely, "will never be able to boast about it."

He went around the house, and from a height near the

tower, he examined the fields, where he saw his brothers and father, at that moment going towards the vineyards. Certain then that he would not meet any one of them, he walked around the pond, crossed the back yard, and entered the house by the kitchen door.

"Good morning, mother!"

Domitila, who was peeling potatoes, started and turned her head.

"So you're here at last?" she exclaimed. "You tramp! If I beat you to death you wouldn't pay for the night you gave me! . . . You shameless creature! You worse than shameless! Is this the time to come home? . . . And that's the shy little boy! . . ."

She did her best to pretend fury but could not manage it. The pleasure she felt in seeing him was evident through her simulated anger.

"Please don't scold me, mother!" begged the youth.

"What? Not scold you? . . . Tan your hide, that's what I should do! And I'm not telling you what your father has in store for you. You better keep out of his sight. Do you hear me? Because with the first blow he's going to knock all of your teeth out."

Suddenly she got up, and her black eyes flashed flame.

"What?" she shouted, approaching him with a grin. "Let me look at you. Who scratched your face? Holy Virgin! You have a cut on your neck! A knife cut! Did you have a fight with anyone?"

Martin interrupted her:

"Please, mother, don't talk, I'm in a hurry. Is there anyone home?"

"No one but Agueda. But are you trying to tell me that you're going away?"

"Right away. I came just to say good-bye."

In a sudden wild frenzy like the blast of a furnace, Domitila embraced her son desperately, flattening her face against his breast as if she foresaw that she was losing him.

She became ghastly white. One would say that all her arteries had emptied at once.

"Ay, Martin!" she sobbed. "Martin, my son! . . . You have killed some one. My Lord, why do you try me so?"

Her arms loosened, and hung limp beside the little body which time had bent; her teeth began to chatter. In the waxen despair of her face, her sharp features trembled agonizingly with quick jerks, tragic and comic at once.

"Child of my womb!" she cried, "is that what I brought you up for, to see you lost? Holy Virgin! Mother of God! For the sake of your sufferings, of your tears when our Lord was on the cross, save my son! See, I'm going mad! Little Virgin of the Immaculate Conception, Queen of the Heavens, little Virgin, help me, have pity on me . . . let it all be a dream; little Virgin!"

"Please, mother, be quiet. The Virgin knows what I have done and why I did it!"

That scene, as intense as it was sober, in which the divine mixed familiarly with the human, had in it the accumulated emotion of centuries.

"Speak!" she pleaded; "for the sake of all I suffered when I gave you birth, tell me, whom did you fight with?"

"With cousin Cayetano."

"My God! . . . Did you kill him?"

"I left him for dead."

As if she had received a blow, Domitila shrank, became smaller, and covered her eyes with her apron.

"My God!" she moaned. "My God! . . . I have lost my son! . . . I have lost my son!"

These words were followed by a brief silence, during which each soul seemed to be held tightly by the other.

Martin Santoyo had begun to unwrap his handkerchief, from which he took a piece of flesh, moist, red and twisted, as if still palpitating.

"Please, mother, pass this over the fire so that I can eat it."

Domitila took the bloody piece, examined it, and her wide fanatical eyes filled with horror.

"It's a tongue!"

"Yes. It's Cayetano's. I cut it out because he cut down my rose bush. In front of Matias and Mateo I said it, 'I'll eat the tongue of anyone who dares to cut my rose bush.' I swore it in the name of the Lord, so that my cousin would believe me. But he paid no attention. And I have to keep my oath to the end."

As the old woman, petrified by fear, did not move, he added brusquely:

"I've sworn it in the name of our Lord and that's enough! . . . So please, mother, do as I ask. What are you waiting for?"

Thinking that perhaps her son was right, Domitila took a few mechanical steps towards the fireplace, but the terror that possessed her paralysed her, and as she bent over the fire, her trembling hand let the sinister piece of flesh fall on the ashes.

Furious, Martin Santoyo cursed:

"Get out of my way, mother. Damn my luck! Get away from here!"

He seized the tragic spoil, bore it to his mouth, and tugging at it like a wild beast, began to devour it. Tall and sturdy, with his little head, he was ghastly. His mother, sitting on the ground, her arms crossed, looked at him and seemed to be praying for him. At each new mouthful, the strong lean throat of the cannibal contracted from the effort with another spasm of disgust and anger. When he had swallowed the last bite he roared:

"There! As I swore!"

He spat, and with the sleeve of his jacket he wiped his lips several times—lips which were stained with blood, blood partly his own. And then, taking Señora Domitila by both arms, he forced her to get up.

"Good-bye, mother!" he said. "I must escape. Some day

you may hear from me. . . . Now give me your blessing."

He had bent one knee on the floor. Holding him thus, almost to her height, the old woman put both her hands on his head, and kissed his forehead. Solemnly, without crying, she said:

"I bless you, child, and I'll pray for you. May God not abandon you, and the Immaculate Virgin go with you, and may Jesus keep you free from all harm!"

Possessed by an ineffable well-being, the youth got up, and passionately embraced his mother. Then he kissed her with a sweet tenderness, he had never before felt, as if at that moment the blood from which he sprang called to his own.

"In case we don't see each other again, mother! . . ."

She repeated in a voice moved and distant, which Martin heard for the first time:

"Yes, child, in case we don't see each other again. . . ."

With trembling speed she walked beside him to the porch. There the fugitive gave her another kiss, and then ran up the river's edge towards the woods. It was six o'clock.

Almost at the same time, a few boys who had left at dawn to hunt for birds, returned to the town hurriedly with the news that Cayetano Rionda was lying at the door of the cemetery, apparently dead. The first ones to hear of the catastrophe were the parents of the victim, the mysterious absence of their son having filled them with cruel forebodings and kept them awake all night long. The furious cries of Irene Santoyo, who ran out into the street not fully dressed, and the frightful threats of her husband, running behind her crazed with pain, filled the town with alarm. Almost immediately, as if set in action by an electric current, the doors and windows of all the houses were opened, and the tragic news penetrated into the drowsy homes like a draught. In the rosy silence of the morning the townsfolk could distinctly hear the voice of a woman wailing:

"My son has been killed. Holy Virgin, they have killed my son!"

Since the mourner, pulling her white hair, ran to and fro senselessly, the frightful cries came nearer or retreated irregularly. The people asked nervously:

"Has anything happened?"

"It looks like it."

"A fight, do you know?"

"They say some one has killed Cayetano Rionda."

"Who?"

"No one knows. Some boys brought back the news."

The whole village vibrated, stirred and pitying, and a wave of compassion enveloped the unfortunate mother, who, madly tearing at her throat, cried her ghastly pain from street to street.

Half an hour later, some young men who had gone out in a hurry to fetch Cayetano brought the victim back with them. The wounded boy could still breathe and had opened his eyes. On the Vaquerizo bridge they met his parents, solicitously escorted by many people. Entirely out of her mind, Irene Santoyo threw herself on the inanimate body, covering its face with kisses.

"Son of my soul!" she kept repeating. "Son of my soul! Who harmed you? Who? Tell me and I'll eat his heart!"

The crowd had stopped. With the aid of several men, Celedonio tried to tear his wife from the wounded boy, but couldn't. Her mother love redoubled her strength and turned her into a beast. Completely conscious now, Cayetano looked at her with an infinite despair in his eyes, and his lips, horribly cut, let out a guttural, unintelligible lament.

"Speak, son of my soul!" insisted Irene, in whom the desire to take revenge was no less ardent than her pain. "Speak, who wounded you? If you are going to die, at least tell me. Tell me! . . . don't you hear me?"

He moved his head, opened his eyes, and his bloody face became disfigured with strange grimaces.

"When did they wound you? Last night . . . No? Who did it?"

One of the young men who was holding Cayetano exclaimed:

"Don't ask him to speak, Señora Irene. You make him suffer that way. He will never speak again; his tongue is cut out. . . ."

Rionda's wife fell in a faint when she heard of this mutilation. The mother's pain and the savage cruelty with which the attacker had performed his ferocious deed infuriated the town, the women in particular. Deeply moved, the men forgot to return to their work; they were bent on catching the criminal, and dragging him along the roads.

"If we cut him to pieces," the people were saying, "and then burnt him, he wouldn't pay for what he did."

Very soon it was known that the author of the terrible deed was Martin Santoyo. The sons of Hernandez Halcon were the first to accuse him, and the name of Santoyo, which since the killing of "Mil Reales" had come to be feared, passed again from mouth to mouth. They told how Cayetano, bantering his cousin, finally had some words with him, and of the oath which Martin had made to eat the tongue of anyone who dared to cut down his rose bush. They also told how Cayetano, disregarding the threats of his cousin, cut the rose bush, and how towards dusk, when they were in the company of Rionda, Martin approached his cousin with the intention, no doubt, of challenging him, and that after that no one had seen them again.

These details circulated through the square from group to group with incredible rapidity. The ire of the people became more stormy every minute. The secret aversion which everybody had nursed against Manuel Santoyo, so quarrelsome, so self-satisfied, and so fortunate in his business ventures, came to the surface, and the envious and cowardly mob now took advantage of that opportunity to humiliate the "little boss," and punish him in the person of his son. "A chip of the old block"; Martin was like his father, and by what he had just done be proclaimed his origin. It was impossible

to leave the brutal act unpunished, and to revenge Cayetano no one thought of asking the Civil Guard for help. The vengeance had to be immediate, and in proportion to the crime. The townspeople, trembling with anger, wanted to administer justice with their own hands.

In front of the home of the wounded boy there had collected a large crowd, in whom the incessant laments of Irene kept the flames of compassion and reprisal alive. The ill-feeling increased. The public conscience had condemned the criminal to death, and the fierce sentence had to be fulfilled without delay.

"The least we can do for that poor mother," some said, "is to present her with Martin's tongue on a platter."

A group of some fifty or sixty men and women, in front of whom Paco Camacho walked tossing his arms, left the town for the mill. All of them hurried impatiently, and their voices could be heard from afar.

They were already nearing the mill when Manuel Santoyo, who had seen them approaching, worried about Martin whose absence he could not understand, came out to receive them. Matias and Mateo accompanied him nervously and shortly after Leandro and his sons arrived, drawn from their tasks by their desire to know what motivated this strange visit.

Paco Camacho stepped out of the group which had halted and approached them.

"We come," he said, addressing himself to Manuel in an imperious tone, "in search of Martin. And if he's not here, we want you to tell us where he is to be found."

A woman shouted:

"Death to Martin!"

Her voice was echoed by other angry voices:

"Death to the Santoyos!"

These threats gave the miller to understand that something very serious had occurred, but he also gleaned from

them that if in the incident there was a death it was not Martin's. This certainty reassured him greatly.

"I don't understand what all this is about," he said. "I haven't seen my son."

"Martin," continued Camacho who, little accustomed to acting in such dramatic conflicts, was very excited, "gravely wounded his cousin Cayetano last night, and after wounding him, cut his tongue out. Do you understand? . . . And I, and the worthy people who are with me here, demand that you give up the criminal."

Greatly alarmed, Mateo and Matias looked at each other. After a short silence, Manuel replied calmly:

"I don't know what you're talking about. My son did not come home last night."

One of the posse exclaimed, addressing himself to the group:

"Don't listen to him. He lies! . . . He's hiding his son! Let's search the house! . . ."

Hoarse voices agreed:

"Yes, yes, we'll search the house! . . ."

Paco Camacho turned towards his companions. The idea of entering a house by force filled him with fear.

"Let's not be too rash!" he exclaimed. "We can't do it without a court order. Besides, the most probable thing is that Martin is not here!"

At that moment, Manuel Santoyo, who had hurriedly entered the mill, reappeared with his gun.

"It has two bullets!" he shouted throwing it to his shoulder and pointing it at the crowd. "The first to move gets one!"

The threatened men hesitated, and those in front retreated a step. They knew the miller was a good shot.

"Did you think," sneered Santoyo, "it would cost you nothing to enter?"

Matias and Mateo, near him, were also ready to repel the aggression.

Paco Camacho exclaimed in a conciliating tone, for in timid men fear predisposes to friendship:

"Don't be a fool, Manuel! Don't shoot! It isn't necessary!"

In a low voice he spoke with those around him, and after brief deliberation the crowd dispersed. Then Santoyo, more calm now, asked his sons if they knew anything of the quarrel to which these people had referred. They told him what had happened between their brother and cousin the day before, repeating more or less word for word the oath Martin had taken. Manuel Santoyo slowly and thoughtfully went over to the rose bush and convinced himself that it had been cut. He thought that if Cayetano had had the temerity to keep his word it was not surprising that Martin should have kept his. Though this idea pained him, it flattered him also. For it convinced him that Martin was brave, and courage was to his mind the first of all the manly virtues. He ended by feeling proud of the savage behaviour of his son.

"It's an ill wind that blows no good," he thought brutally. "With his tongue cut out, Cayetano will be exempt from military service! And that is money that that pig his father will save. . . ."

Returning to the town, Paco Camacho informed all those who met him of their failure and the haughty attitude of the miller. This news, and Don Blas's report on the fourteen slashes on the body of the victim, some of them very dangerous, irritated the town still more. The disturbance was fast becoming a riot. Neither the mayor, nor "Don Profundo" whom everybody asked for advice, knew what to do. Finally they agreed that whoever had firearms should put himself under the orders of the corporal of the Civil Guard and his three men, and go out immediately in search of the criminal.

It was not yet nine o'clock when about two hundred men, many of them provided with guns and followed by their dogs, started the search. All of them were in fine spirits; more

than the desire to deal out justice it was the exhilaration of the chase that filled them. In conformity with their hunting customs, they divided into two parties, one of which searched both sides of the Guadalsazar while the other, crossing the Vaquerizo, rounded the cemetery hill. As they advanced, the scouts deployed in order to cover a greater area, and in such a hurry were they that in less than half an hour they formed a curved front, like a quarter moon, no less than a mile across. Thus spread, and keeping their line and distances, though they could not see each other, they advanced towards the north, across the wooded region in the gulleys and hollows of which they suspected Martin might be found. Those who marched at the end of the line advanced at a faster pace; and gradually the line took the shape of a horseshoe, and finally closed like the mouth of a fishing net. A shot and a shout were the signals with which the hunters had agreed to announce Martin's capture.

The search, in which Paco Camacho, not in the least fond of the pleasures of the hunt, had no desire to join, lasted all afternoon. Forgetting to eat, the hunters worked without respite. Knowing the ground thoroughly there was no ditch or watershed they did not search inch by inch, or rocky hiding place or hollow tree trunk they did not poke their heads into, or thick bush into which they did not send their dogs, or pond into which they did not look or throw a stone, or hamlet, stable, or shepherd's cottage they did not visit. The news of the catastrophe had already spread throughout the countryside, and the farmers were intensely interested in the capture of the criminal. The hatred, envy, and fear they all had for Manuel Santoyo rebounded on his son. But in spite of their interest, the search was fruitless. Nobody had seen Martin. It was as if the earth, to punish him for his frightful crime, had swallowed him up.

It was five o'clock in the afternoon when the hunters surrounded the grassy skirts of Stark Mound. The two vanguards had come together. Then Don Bernardo and the

corporal of the Civil Guard discussed what should be done. The advisable thing to do was to start to climb the hill, for the fugitive was certain to be there. But the fatigue of which they all began to complain, the steep slope dotted with possible hiding places, the dangerous declivities, and above all the late hour, made them desist.

The disappointment of the inhabitants of Carrascal del Horcajo when the posse returned towards dusk with empty hands was very great. The searchers recounted their efforts, and their sore feet and their obvious exhaustion testified to the ardour of their hunt. Where was Martin hiding? This question exasperated everybody. The commentators on the events of the day spent all their energy in interminable conjectures, and while some who knew the vigour and strength of Martin thought him far away already, others maintained that he had not left the mill.

That night the café had all the animation of a Sunday. People exchanged impressions, nosed about for news, and there were some who maintained that Martin, a prey to his own conscience, would finally give himself up to justice. The inventor of the "dish-tipper" was among these.

"He would not be the first to act that way," he repeated.

The unexpected appearance of Leandro Santoyo surprised the customers. Of those present a good many stood up; others surrounded the miller, deafening him with questions. Leandro, who came to the café precisely to clear himself of any blame that might have fallen on him for his nephew's behaviour, answered everybody with gravity. His face and his low voice expressed distress and shame.

"I don't know," he said, "what has happened to that brute. But I can assure you he is not at the mill."

He sat down at the table where Barral, who was terribly excited by the contradictions of the doctor, perorated with greater ardour than ever.

"I don't care if he hears me!" exclaimed Don Diosdado, referring to the miller. "He knows the love I have for him

and is too intelligent to be offended by my words. I am speaking of his brother. The Santoyo breed is endowed with a quarrelsome and intense life; they represent force and aggressiveness. Were it not for them we would have no topic of conversation in this town. But I must also proclaim their selfishness and their rapacity. They are a plague. Mark the facts: Manuel broke my leg; and now his son cuts out Cayetano's tongue. Such is the trail which this sinister family leaves behind it. In the present case, however, though of course with certain reservations, I defend Martin."

Hernandez Halcon burst out angrily:

"Are you going to say," he shouted, "that Martin Santoyo is insane?"

"I wouldn't say insane; I would say irresponsible."

"Irresponsibility and insanity are synonymous concepts, my friend. All insane men are irresponsible. Even children before they go to school know that."

"Very true," replied Don Diosdado briskly. "All insane people are irresponsible. But on the other hand, not all irresponsible people are insane. And the reason for that is that insanity actuates from within outwards. Do you follow me? Insanity proceeds from a degeneration or atrophy of the nervous centres, while irresponsibility comes to us from the outside, from our environment. The great number of cases which we call 'irresponsible' are not active, but passive; I mean by that that they are only instruments of the environment which leads them here and there."

Don Blas attempted to answer, but the chemist gave him no time.

"Your children and mine," he continued, "have informed us exactly how Cayetano and his cousin came to challenge each other. Cayetano mocked his cousin, told him that if he did not accompany him to the bullfight he would cut down the rose bush. To this Martin, his self-respect wounded, replied: 'I'll cut out the tongue of anyone who dares to cut down my rose bush.' He then added, 'I swear it in the name

of God.' To unbelievers like you or me, an oath is no more than a phrase, or a purely human obligation. But for a pious believer an oath carries with it a divine compulsion. It is the inexorable, that which cannot be left undone without exposing oneself to the loss of one's soul. The man who in a fit of passion calls upon God to witness his oath can never, under any pretext, take his word back. And I think that fully explains Martin's brutal savagery. I think it was much more due to fanaticism than to ferocity. Don Lotario, from his desk, and Cirilo, from his pulpit, slowly inculcated in him, through daily repetition, the idea that the name of The Omnipotent One must not be taken in vain. And once he had sworn, though his sensibilities might later have advised him differently, he had to keep his word."

The words of the chemist raised a tempest of vehement protest. Unanimously those who listened to him declared him wrong. And even "Don Profundo," usually so adverse to argument, made gestures of protest.

"You are utterly wrong!" snorted Hernandez Halcon. "Your paradoxes are insincere. What you are throwing at us are not reasons but sophisms!"

"I am sincere," he exclaimed. "I try to explain the facts, not mystify them. We live in a barbaric moral environment. Our daily bread is cruelty. At the first show of disagreement between two persons we resort to insults when not to blows. We can't argue without coming to blows. And if we want to take revenge on some one—and in this I see our Moorish atavism—we try to do it on that part of the body which directly offended us. Leandro here is witness of how four days ago a pedlar almost crushed the hand of a child who tried to steal a few sweets from him. If a man looks through the keyhole at our wife undressing, we want to put his eyes out. If a child says something embarrassing, his mother strikes him on the mouth. And the man who has an injured leg, for example, will offer the Virgin a wax replica of it if she cures him. Martin behaved according to this criterion,

which has a religious origin, and from that I deduce his irresponsibility. Let us be logical, gentlemen: the hangman does not kill; it's the law. And in the present drama the same thing has happened. It was not Martin but Carrascal del Horcajo which cut out Cayetano Rionda's tongue. . . ."

At half past ten the café began to empty, and no sooner had the last customer disappeared, than Don Diosdado called Paulina to his table. The pharmacist was in the company of the mayor and Camacho, and the three of them were solemnly preoccupied.

Barral ordered "La Repetia" to lock the doors to be certain that no one would interrupt them, and then gravely invited her to sit down. She did so, curious to know the reason for so much precaution.

"In view of the failure of the search to capture Martin," explained Don Diosdado, "the mayor here and I decided to ask you to help us out."

The innkeeper, suspecting what they wanted of her, pretended not to understand.

"Come, now, don't start pretending!" ordered Barral. "Be frank! You are somewhat of a seer, Paulina. Shortly after you knew me you looked, I don't know how, into my past, and from your lips I heard secrets which only I knew. Remember? Therefore we need your help to catch Martin this very night. The good name of our town demands it."

He paused to light a cigarette and then continued:

"I'm not at all superstitious, and yet at times I am afraid of you. Your eyes see very far, I am sure. Lolita, the girl who played the piano, used to disturb your mother by going over her scales from morning till night. One day, in front of us all, you exclaimed furiously, 'I hope to God some misfortune happens to her to make her stop.' And shortly afterward your wish was granted, for Lolita's father died suddenly, and the girl, in mourning, closed her piano, forgot the little she used to know, and has never played a note since. That is the truth! Lolita's silence represents in the history

of your witchcraft what theatre critics call 'a personal triumph.' You can also tell the future. Remember the death of 'Mil Reales.' "

Paulina was silent. She did not want to compromise herself. The memory of Manuel Santoyo, whom she feared, was like a hand which gagged her mouth. But Don Diosdado, promising to repay her for her work, and assuring her that no one would ever know what she told them, persuaded her to talk.

Under the light of the hanging kerosene lamp, which smoked more than it shed light, the broad, unshaven, coppery face of the mayor, the lean, attenuated, open-mouthed face of Camacho, and the big reddish head of the chemist assumed the same anxious expression.

Paulina bent her head on her breast, crossed her hands as if in prayer, and closed her eyes. For a few minutes she remained in this position. Then she said:

"I've found him already! I see him asleep under some bushes by the river . . . the place they call 'Muddy Hole.' He seems to me very exhausted, very sad . . . but he is afraid and his sleep is not sound; he wants to go. . . ."

The woman stopped and opened her eyes. She smiled, sighed. She had not moved, and yet the three men thought that at that moment she seemed to have returned from far away.

"You say," asked Barral anxiously, "that Martin is asleep?"

"Yes, but very lightly. If you want to catch him you must go immediately, before two o'clock in the morning, the time the cocks begin to crow." With a vexed gesture she added:

"That's all I know. Don't ask me any more, I'm tired."

She begged to be allowed to leave. Then Barral ordered his brother-in-law:

"Go and get the corporal! Quick! If's he in bed have him get up. Run!"

Lean, yellowish, stretching his thin legs as far as he

could, Paco Camacho rushed out of the café. Fifteen minutes later he returned accompanied by the corporal of the Guard, who, informed by the inventor of what was up, came fully armed. He was a man of about fifty, corpulent, with the face of a bandit. He could have made a drawing of 'Muddy Hole' by heart.

"Will you have two of your men go with you?" asked Camacho.

"I need no help," replied the corporal. "One man is enough for another."

Since Manuel Santoyo had killed "Mil Reales" he hated the miller, who had done what he had never been able to do, and now he wanted to get even for that defeat by catching Martin.

For two hours he walked beside the Guadalsazar, and when he arrived at the place he was headed for, he reached for his gun. Advancing slowly in order not to make any noise, he climbed a treeless slope. The moon was full and by its light he could see everything clearly.

The innkeeper was right. There was Martin, asleep.

"Hello there!" shouted the corporal, pointing his gun at him.

With a leap which brought him to his feet, Martin awoke. His first impulse was to flee, but he understood very well that his captor would kill him and he gave himself up. Without speaking, of his own accord, he advanced a step, holding his arms before him with his wrists together.

"I've no rope to tie you with," said the corporal.

"There's no need for it either," replied the young man, "I don't intend to escape."

"It would cost you your life."

"I know it."

"Anyway," replied the guard, whom thirty years of experience had made distrustful, "you can tear the buttons off your trousers. Then you'll have to walk holding them up and won't be able to run."

The prisoner obeyed.

"And now," said the corporal without lowering his gun, "march!"

In single file, without further words they arrived at the town. Fortunately for Martin, the town still slept.

XIII

FOR three continuous months Manuel Santoyo was a slave to the lust which Agueda, with her humble and helpless appearance, fired in him. The ugliness of Domitila fanned his passion. He could not sleep, and in the fields the memory of the girl seared his mind and paralysed his arms. Agueda did not hate him—her tender heart was incapable of harbouring strong emotions—but she was afraid of him, and carefully avoided his presence. Useless effort. The old miller would watch for her; from the distance his little inflamed eyes hidden under the bushy eyebrows would spy her, and when the girl thought herself most safe, her pursuer would jump on her like a cock; sometimes behind the mill pond near the water wheel; at other times in the open field, under the shelter of any bush, or on the steep narrow stairs of the tower, taking advantage of the moment in which Agueda came back from feeding the pigeons; or at dawn, in the kitchen, when everybody had left for the fields and Domitila was chopping wood in the back yard.

These rapid assaults, without preambles, inspired a superstitious terror in the victim. When she thought herself safest she would suddenly feel herself held, pushed against a wall, or tumbled onto the ground, with a brutal strength which made all resistance impossible. The satyr asphyxiated her with his breath, bit her lips, and his fingers, hard as iron hooks, sank into her flesh. Agueda felt it was not "the master" but the Devil himself who entered her.

"Mama . . ." she would moan; "ma . . . ma. . . ."

And yielding altogether, her eyes closed, with both hands she would make the sign of the cross.

When Manuel learnt that the girl was pregnant his attitude changed radically. He suddenly felt indifferent to her. Her pregnancy was a danger for him, a possible chain; and without transition his egotism abruptly strangled his desire. It was necessary for him to avoid responsibility; to efface as much as possible what he had done. He decided to accuse the victim, so that she, later, should not be able to accuse him.

One afternoon, towards the middle of November, while everybody was busy picking olives, Manuel Santoyo, inhuman and cunning, addressed himself to Leandro, to whom he had not spoken for a long time:

"I have very bad news to tell you. . . ."

"What?"

Surprised that his brother should speak to him, Leandro came near him. He expected a reconciliation and did not disguise his pleasure. Manuel took him aside.

"I want to talk to you about Agueda."

"What about?"

"You did so much for her, that I tell you . . . she doesn't deserve it. I don't believe in 'making one hole to fill up another.' I like to talk plainly, do you understand? 'Plough deep, and you will bake bread in due time,' the proverb teaches; this is very true when the earth is rich, for otherwise you will pluck thistles. That is what's happened to you. In Agueda you cultivated a plot that was not only ungrateful but wasn't even yours, and that business about 'He who gives bread to some one else's dog loses the bread and the dog,' has happened again."

"I don't know," replied Leandro, puzzled, "what you are talking about."

"You brought her to live with us against my will; you said she was honest, and we thought she was, and now,

after so long, we find out that the miserable wench is in trouble."

Leandro paled.

"How did you find out?"

"Well! You would know yourself if you only took a look at her belly. She must be in her fourth month already!"

His brother did not answer. He was thinking of the enormous responsibility which, without any fault of his, he had assumed. When Don Lotario should sooner or later find out what had befallen his daughter, what was he to answer?

Manuel added, sinking the dagger of his calumny to the hilt:

"Whoever got her that way? . . . Unless she tells us, it will not be easy to find out. It could be one of your sons as well as one of mine . . . they're all old enough for that! Though, to be frank with you, I believe the man who did it is Paco Camacho."

Taking note of his brother's silence, he continued:

"You understand that under the circumstances Agueda can't continue with us a single day longer. Not on your or my account, the devil take it! But for our daughters. You know how people gossip in a town like this. . . . Therefore I leave this matter in your hands. Since you brought her here you had better send her away without further ado as soon as possible. Speak to her father, explain to him the trouble she's in, and let him find out who his son-in-law is. . . . You and I will wash our hands of the matter."

This was more than enough to make Leandro, who loved the girl with fatherly tenderness, sink in confusion and lose all control of himself. Filled sometimes with tenderness for the poor abused girl, or again, shaken by fits of anger against the seducer, during the rest of the day he was not able to work, and every time Agueda looked at him, angrily turned his eyes away from her. At times he hated her. Dur-

ing supper the presence of the impure girl next to Maria became intolerable for him, and fearing that he would not be able to keep his irritation within bounds, he left the table saying he was sick and was going to bed.

When Petra came into the bedroom, after her chores were done, Leandro told her all that his brother had said, before she had time to undress. He noticed with surprise that his wife was not at all shocked. Petra, in fact, had observed the change in Agueda. The girl seemed frightened and melancholy, she cried easily, and often complained of nausea and headaches. . . .

"She has said nothing to me," said Petra, "but I felt sure—God forgive me!—that something was the matter with that poor girl. But we don't know whether she was forced or it happened with her consent."

Leandro Santoyo remained deeply thoughtful. Then he said:

"If this is true, what should we do?"

Petra forgot that as a girl she had given herself freely, and answered selfishly:

"Return her to her father immediately. The affair is too delicate for us to get mixed up in. No more trouble, please! With the trouble your brother gives us, we have enough!"

Next morning, on their way to the olive orchard, Leandro Santoyo asked Agueda about her health in such circumspect terms that not even remotely did he appear to be referring to the mystery he wished to clear up.

"Since you hurt your hand," he said, "you don't seem to be able to raise your head from the ground. What is the matter? . . . I always find you sad. Is there anything the matter with you? . . . You seem like another person."

These last words cut the pained heart of the girl. It was the thing she had said to herself since the master had made her his. "I am another. . . . I am another! . . ." And now it seemed that the transformation in her womb had climbed to her face and was visible to others. Suddenly faint, she

dropped her chin on her breast and burst out crying. Fearing that she would fall Leandro held her up, putting an arm around her waist, and both sat down on a slope of the ground, by a thorn bush which hid them from sight. To show that he was not in a hurry the miller lit a cigarette, and began to smoke it slowly. At intervals, between puffs, he sighed deeply. Then he spoke:

"Let me know, tell me, what has happened to you? . . . For I'm sure something *is* the matter. Be frank. Do you hear me? Be frank with me. You can talk with me better than with anyone. Isn't that so? Better even than with your own father. Because your father beat you and I've never done that. I brought you to my house with the desire to better your life a little and to teach you how to read. And if I didn't accomplish my purpose it wasn't for lack of good will, you know. . . ."

Agueda trembled, fixed on her protector a penetrating look, her tears stopped, and under her hands her face acquired an intense pallor. This reaction, which seemed to involve anger, urged Leandro to continue:

"You should speak as if you were at the confessional," he continued. "Pour out your pain to me. It will relieve you. If you love me a little, if I am a little in your heart, speak openly, as if you were talking to your own heart. Speaking to me ought to be as though you were talking aloud to yourself."

He allowed a few moments to go by, and added with cunning persuasiveness:

"Has my brother beaten you? . . . He hasn't? . . . Domitila, perhaps? She hasn't either? . . . Is my wife treating you badly then? . . ."

Agueda pressed her lips together, closing them obstinately over the secret which bounded within her heart. How gladly would she have told it! . . . But she did not dare. To tell the truth was to thrust her benefactor into a fight with his brother. Señor Manuel was even more fierce than his son, and she remembered the horror of Martin's deed. No! Even

if her entrails were to be ripped from her, she would not talk! . . . She should have spoken when Martin, in an impulse of pity, had kissed her and asked her why she was crying. Had she then begged him, "Take me away!" . . . perhaps then the youth would not have kept his oath and she would have succeeded in averting his crime. That unique opportunity gone, her duty was to keep silent, and this duty she would comply with even if tortured. Besides, a secret voice, one of those silent, small voices which from time to time whisper at the bottom of one's soul, told her that Señor Leandro, in spite of the love he bore her, would forgive everything . . . everything but "that." This desolate conviction made her break down again, and once more tears rolled down her cheeks abundantly.

All these emotional reactions began to convince the miller that his wife had not made a mistake about the girl's critical condition. As he had spoken, he had slowly used up the slender sum of euphemisms and delicate circumlocutions by which he had tried to approach the truth, and now he did not know what to add. The obstinacy of his protégée began to irritate him. He had the right to find out, and his patience came to an end.

"Is it true what I suspect?" he exclaimed. "If it is true, don't deny it! You're pregnant."

Agueda answered this round affirmation with a sob, and her shoulders began trembling. Leandro could see it clearly now. Agueda kept silent, and silence gives consent. His voice became rougher.

"I haven't made a mistake. You are pregnant. But who by . . . I must know. . . ."

The girl kept silent. Leandro did not accept Manuel's opinion that Paco Camacho was to blame. He could not conceive that the inventor of the "dish-tipper," lean, drawn-out, and weak as he was, could violate a maiden, however much she should permit it. In spite of this he asked:

"Was it Paco Camacho? . . ."

Hearing this name Agueda raised her sunken head, and with wide eyes looked at the miller. She remembered, in fact, that Camacho had showed up at the mill shortly after the master had left, and she was surprised that Leandro should know of that visit. She did not make a sign, however. Santoyo continued:

"Why can't you be frank with me? Who could defend you better than I? . . . I'd do it out of love for you, and because it is my duty, since your father trusted you to my care. Speak. Was it Matias who abused you? . . ."

He thought he had guessed right, and continued impatiently:

"It was Matias, wasn't it? Matias. . . ."

She shook her head. His brother flashed through Leandro's mind. If Manuel should have dared! But this thought was so monstrous, that, disgusted, he repelled it immediately, and another one more reasonable came to console him.

"Was it my son Domingo? . . . If it was he, tell me without fear, because, either I lose my name, or he marries you! . . ."

This time the girl did not move; she did not cry, or appear to perceive what was going on at all. She looked at the ground. She seemed like an idiot.

Tired of persisting fruitlessly, Leandro got up.

"Well," he said, "it's up to you! This coming April I am planning to leave for America. If you want to come with us, you will tell me. . . ."

These unexpected words cut so deeply into Agueda that they made her talk.

"I want to go away!" she murmured.

"With us?"

The stupid expression of the girl forced the miller to raise his voice. Quiet, absorbed, and apparently far off, Agueda gave the impression of a person in a trance.

"Will you come with us?" insisted Leandro.

"No. I want to go away from here, but alone . . . all alone."

"Where to?"

"Somewhere. I don't know . . . somewhere, all alone. . . ."

Leandro Santoyo left, without having discovered the answer to what preoccupied him so much. He was certain, however, that the girl was pregnant, and in spite of himself, this conviction estranged him from her. He felt offended, jealous. "She has deceived me," he thought. "I wouldn't have thought it possible." It was the pain, the angry spite of a man who has been robbed. "I was taking care of her," he would say to himself, "and meanwhile the impudent slut was putting me to ridicule." He gave up the idea that any of his sons was to blame for the crime, to reaffirm the belief that it was Matias. "Whoever it was," he said, clenching his fists, "has had the laugh on me." Inevitably, without his desiring it, the love he bore her fled from his heart. It left him gradually and insensibly, like the heat from a dying coal. A few hours later he thought it was foolish to be concerned about a creature to whom he was not tied by any sort of bond. His opinions, much less liberal than he knew, ran aground in the pious, stupid, cruel and conventional environment in which he lived. Accessible to the hereditary intolerance of his surroundings, he saw Agueda as impure, the victim of a contagious and terrible disease. It was therefore necessary to flee from her, to get her away, to eliminate her.

"This time," he exclaimed, "Manuel is right! Agueda doesn't deserve to stay at the mill any longer. I'm sorry, but I'll have to send her away. I can't allow my daughters, the older ones especially, to treat her as an equal."

The news, quickly spread, that Agueda was pregnant, was exquisite honey around which the town swarmed, tasting it with the greatest delectation. Doña Gerarda was one of the first who found it out. And then the mayor's wife and Clara Luz. Each of these women, so different from the

other, looked at the misfortune from a different point of view. Don Diosdado's wife was indulgent; Doña Gerarda, hostile and offended; and the gossipy wife of the mayor, sly, calumniating and vulgar. The last two reactions reflected the common feeling. With pitiless inhumanity the whole town, the women especially, declared themselves against Agueda, calling her calculating and impudent. The gossips asserted that she had wanted to force a marriage and had provoked the scandal. This method of defamation was ancient and produced certain results.

"The Santoyos," they said, "may not be the best of people, but it is only fair to admit that in the present case they don't deserve such treatment."

No one knew the author of the outrage, but names were freely mentioned. Some were certain it was Matias, others Domingo, and there were even some who accused Leandro of having carried his love for the girl a little too far.

Barral and Hernandez Halcon were one day talking with old Lucas the barber when, like an invisible butterfly, a fresh piece of news fluttered through the barber shop. It was brought over by one of the mill hands. While he was being shaved he asked if Don Lotario, the teacher, had gone by, and to a negative reply he added:

"Do you know what's happened? . . . His daughter Agueda disappeared from the mill last night."

His listeners were so astonished that before inquiries could begin there was a long silence. Lucas at last exclaimed:

"Who has she gone away with? . . ."

"As far as we know, with no one. And if anyone is with her he is not from our house. They say that Señor Leandro was very angry with her when he found out about her, and early yesterday after having given her quite a scolding told her very plainly that he could not keep her in his house any longer, and that she had to return to her father. I suppose the girl didn't want to go back and has escaped."

"Alone?" insisted Hernandez Halcon distrustfully.

The man answered:

"It seems so. . . ."

"I can't believe it! . . . The making of a baby presupposes two guilty parties, and the logical thing is that Agueda should have gone in the company of her accomplice if she was going away at all. Because it's after and not before tripping, that a woman really falls in love with her man and clings to him. They say she was friendly with Matias. . . ."

"You shouldn't pay any attention to that. . . . They say so many things! Matias hasn't left the mill. If we were to listen to everything people say, we would never end. . . . They also say. . . ."

The farmhand looked askance at Don Diosdado, smiled knowingly, and kept silent. The chemist perceived the look.

"Go on!" he said smiling. "Don't stop! Out with it! . . . Have they told you perhaps that I am the father of the little thing?"

The foxy laugh of the rustic was even more expressive.

"No, not that!"

"Out with it then, won't you?"

"I don't want to say anything. It might annoy you!"

"Don't be afraid of that. You needn't worry! . . . Besides, nothing ever bothers me but my rheumatism. So, unbutton your soul! What do you know?"

All the waiting customers had surrounded the chair where the farmhand, his cheeks covered with soap and his eyes half closed, was being shaved.

"Well, they say," he proceeded, "that the one who got Agueda into that condition was . . . Don Paco Comacho."

"My brother-in-law!" exclaimed the chemist making a gesture in which he expressed his great astonishment.

"It has been proved," continued the informer emphatically, "that the day of the bullfight Don Paco, instead of going to the fight, went to the mill, where Agueda was alone. We learnt this from Cayetano, who met him there that

afternoon, and then told the sons of Don Blas right here."

The chemist knitted his brows; a draught of doubt shook him. He remembered the fact that the inventor of the "reflector matches" had arrived at the square some time after the fight had started. However, the theory seemed too absurd and he warded it off.

"Impossible!" he exclaimed. "How could a man in the first stages of paralysis be mixed up in such an affair? Impossible!"

His astonishment turned into laughter. The picture of his brother, stammering, weak and timid and absolutely incapable of endangering the virginity of any lass, brought back his good humour. The doctor, on the contrary, was uneasy and silent.

The farmhand continued:

"I don't say either yes or no. I'm only repeating what I heard. The day of the fight, which was on a Sunday, Señor Leandro and his family had dinner at the house of Don Celedonio. In the afternoon, Señor Manuel, his wife and sons came into town. I saw them before the hardware shop. Agueda therefore was all alone when Don Paco entered the mill. This was almost four months ago. So that . . . plainer than that . . . And, naturally . . . since Don Paco is a señor . . . I mean, not one of my class, a poor man . . . the girl hasn't dared to accuse him. She probably thought: 'He won't marry me' . . . and has gone away alone . . ."

"Well, well, let her go with God's blessings!" exclaimed an old man; "but let her not knock at my door for a piece of bread, because I'll never give it to her. Anyone who dishonours the house of her benefactors does not deserve any pity. And that's the truth. And don't come to me with the story that Don Paco, or whoever it was, forced her. That's all talk. A man of passion I was in my day, and as fond of women as any, but experience taught me that when a

hen really doesn't want it, there's no cock who can get near her."

A second voice, also old, added implacably:

"She'll soon gather as she has sown . . . and plenty! . . . 'The fox does not do as much harm in one year as he is made to pay for in one hour.' We'll see her despised by everybody and begging on the roads very soon."

Some one else commented:

"Don Lotario hasn't been lucky with his daughters. The poor man! They say that Eulogia and Sebastiana, the two elder ones, who were working in a hotel in Valladolid, have also gone wrong."

The conversation lasted a long time, and all unanimously maintained that in the battles of love it is the man who must always attack and the woman who is obliged to defend herself, in such a way that all the ardour of the gallant will be shattered against her coldness and austere virtue. Some of the customers left and others arrived but the gossip continued interminable around old Lucas. The ancient barber did not work any longer, he could not, his hands shook too much. Crisanto, his oldest son, recently returned from military service, aided by his younger brother—the other two were in the service now—attended to the business. A fire pan placed in the middle of the narrow room warmed the smoky and close atmosphere, badly lit by two lamps hanging from the walls.

It was almost night time already when Don Hernandez Halcon and Don Diosdado left the barber shop and took a slow walk under the porticoes. In spite of the dissimilarity of their characters, they had always gotten along well together, and this old friendship was now more firmly established, due to the approaching wedding of Andromaca Barral with Don Blas's oldest son Eusebio.

Preoccupied by what they had just heard, the two spoke of Agueda, whom they sincerely pitied.

"My dear friend," Don Diosdado said, "I cannot take

lightly what they have been saying about Paco. Tell me, do you really think my brother-in-law capable of the villainy they are accusing him of?"

Hernandez Halcon made a vague gesture, which did not condemn or absolve; the gesture of a man who reserves his opinion. The pharmacist, who had been standing on his left leg, without thinking, inclined towards optimism. His eyes shone, malicious and humorous.

"It is possible," he exclaimed, "that Paco, in his eagerness to discover, 'to see what no one else has ever seen,' as he puts it, should have had a flair for the girl. But it could not have gone beyond desire, I'm sure. There remains, however, a point to be cleared up, and that is: the object of my brother-in-law's visit to the mill precisely that afternoon when he should have suspected there would be no one there."

Another day, commenting on this angle of the affair to Leandro Santoyo, the chemist insinuated the idea that the man to blame for the outrage might be Manuel, basing his opinion on the fact that the afternoon of the feast he did not leave the mill with his wife and sons, but left later, as Don Graciano had informed him.

Instead of denying it, Leandro looked at Don Diosdado for a short time, and said almost in a whisper:

"I have thought of that. . . ."

This confession was a ray of light for Barral. Convinced of the innocence of the inventor, whom he had informed of the unworthy act for which he was being blamed, he communicated his suspicion to several people and was surprised to find that everybody more or less agreed with him though they had nothing certain on which to base their opinion. There was, therefore, a public opinion, a *consensus omnium*, whose importance Don Diosdado well estimated. Truth had at last triumphed. What pores are there, however small they be, through which sooner or later truth will not go? For truth, though much slower but also infinitely more effective than light, there are no opaque bodies. The comments of

Matias and Mateo, who intuitively sensed a meaning in the imperious eagerness with which Manuel had ordered them and their mother to leave the mill, under the pretext that they should get to the bullfight early; the talk of the labourers who worked for the Santoyos, who had noticed the fiery desire with which the master had looked at Agueda on many occasions; the declarations of several people, who remembered having seen the miller talking to Cayetano a few minutes before the fight, at the entrance of the town; and many other details to which nobody until then had attached any importance; all this, coming together at one time, convinced public opinion—no doubt without sufficient reason, but irrevocably—that Agueda's violator was Manuel Santoyo.

The hatred which the town had for Martin, and which reflected on his father, added weight to this belief. The convalescent, mute figure of Cayetano, walking the streets all bandaged up, and his ghastly silence, aggravated that hatred. To Rionda's despair was added that of the unfortunate Don Lotario, who had not heard from his daughter. The people were indignant.

"They are an accursed family," some one said. "We would drag them along the road if we had any shame."

The seventh of December, the day before the feast of the Holy Virgin, Doña Gerarda and Alfonso spied Don Cirilo from their observatory on his way to say mass, and following him, Manuel Santoyo.

Since the time when the miller had forced the priest to marry Maria within the church, and not at the door—as he usually did, believing that neither children without baptism nor unmarried people deserve to enter God's House—the wife of Perez Cadenas hated him.

"There goes that insolent fellow," she said to her daughter; "he's no longer young and does well to pray. His soul is well stained with sin. We have only to beg of our Lord

that he spare him until he pays back what he owes your father."

Don Cirilo crossed the churchyard, and was about to enter the vestry, when Santoyo caught up with him.

"Good day, señor priest," he said.

Don Cirilo turned his head nervously. He had spoken of Manuel in unfavourable terms the night before in the café, and seeing him so abruptly, he experienced a moment of uneasiness.

"So early around here?" he exclaimed. "Do you come to confession?"

"No, but to ask a favour of you."

Don Cirilo was put at ease.

"What is it?"

Santoyo looked at him coldly, domineeringly, and with pretended deliberation said:

"I know that the town is down on me, and when occasion arises, you talk about me the same as everyone else . . . as if I were responsible for what Martin has done."

At the risk of lying, the priest felt obliged to deny the accusation.

"Listen, Manuel, I don't want you to come to me with your stories. I have never spoken about you either for good or evil."

"I'm not asking you," interrupted Manuel haughtily; "I'm only saying what I know, or what I suspect . . . but let's come to the point. I suppose the procession will take place tomorrow."

"God willing, it will leave here at ten o'clock, the same as every year."

"I should like, and that's what I came for, to have the Virgin stop by the mill, even if only for five minutes."

"What are you asking? . . . You must have lost your mind."

Horrified, Don Cirilo raised both hands to his head.

"But tell me why . . ." insisted Manuel.

"After going to the convent, where we'll never arrive until noon, the Virgin must return to the town. My parishioners want to see her more than ever. Your sister, hoping—may God hear her!—that the Most Pure will perform a miracle and give Cayetano back his speech, wants the procession to stop before her house. You will understand that I cannot deny this wish. Marta, your daughter, who is expecting to give birth early next month, has asked for the same thing. The same demands came last night from Don Lotario; Antonio "El Migao," who hopes his son Ciriaco will not be taken into the service; uncle Lucas who, according to Don Blas, is down with the palsy, and many other of the townspeople. If I should tell you that there are more than twenty people asking for the same thing I'd not be exaggerating. So you see we already have more to do than we can take care of until sunset. It's impossible to accommodate you! From the town to your house, if I am not mistaken, it's more than two-thirds of a mile. When would you expect us to get through, then?"

The many difficulties piled up by the curate were not enough to break Santoyo's will.

"Nothing you say convinces me!" he exclaimed. "That the Virgin should go by the mill during the day or night is all the same to me, so long as she does. Do you see what I mean? I want her to go by the mill, so that with her divine eyes she may drive away the witchcraft that has fallen on my house. You may not believe it, but my home is worse than purgatory. We don't even talk to each other any more. You know already the misfortune that befell Agueda. And since they took my son away, Domitila doesn't stop crying. Even I don't recognize myself any longer . . . I'm a different person. . . . We are all as if possessed by devils! And to end this it is necessary that the Most Blessed Virgin of the Conception—she knows what Martin did, and why—should come to us. Do you see? There's no need for further talk!"

"But don't be obstinate, Manuel!" interrupted the priest. "I'm a good friend of yours, and want to please you, believe me. You ought to realize, however, that what you are asking cannot be done. The mill is too far away . . . the men who carry the platforms will be too tired."

"I'm ready to pay them as much as necessary. Whatever they ask for!"

"I thought so! . . ."

"You know that 'for money the dog dances' and even saints! . . . I beg your pardon! With the temper I'm in I forget I'm in God's house!"

Calmly he took ten dollars out of the pocket of his trousers.

"These two hundred reals will cover the initial expense; later you and I will settle the rest," he said.

"You're the most headstrong man!"

"We're agreed then, are we?"

Don Cirilo pocketed the money.

"Yes, of course!" he exclaimed, sighing. "Who can argue with you?"

"The Virgin will go by the mill?"

"Yes. We'll take her there before sunset."

"Sunshine or moonlight, it's all the same to me, as long as I can see her there and can say a prayer to her from my door."

The fervour of his words moved Don Cirilo.

"You need the Most Pure to give you peace," he said.

With this agreement they separated.

At ten o'clock the following day the town band began to play a sort of religious hymn in front of the church, announcing the procession. The little square of Saint Martin, bathed in a pale sunlight which hardly warmed, was crowded with people. The balconies were overfilled; and even in the open windows under the eaves of the small houses there were happy and curious faces. The crowd which up to then had gathered against the sacred atrium, broke into two groups,

opening a way between them. When the ancient doors of the church opened solemnly, screeching on their rusty hinges, all heads were uncovered.

Majestically, the cortège appeared. The march was headed by the mayor, who wore a very wide grey cloak, reaching almost to his feet, giving him the appearance of a beetle. Behind him advanced a tall, clumsy fellow, in shirt-sleeves, carrying the cross some seven feet tall, and next to him "Don Profundo," stiff and serious, as if the mission which he was then fulfilling was very sad, followed by the magistrates, Don Isidro Perez Cadenas and Celedonio Rionda, each in a cloak. From the wide portal of the church they came out slowly, in stately processional formation, and the crowd gaped at them eagerly, as if they were strangers. Then, on a large handbarrow, appeared the Infant Jesus, lying in his manger, and then came another Infant, standing, and carrying a white lamb. The enthusiasm of the people increased momentarily; some of the women were moved to tears. From several windows, rockets tore whistling into the blue sky.

A stertorian voice shouted:

"Viva the Child God!"

This "Viva" was answered by a fanatical, thundering shout from the crowd, which rumbled through the square and shook the naked branches of the acacias. Behind the protecting window panes of their spying place, Doña Gerarda and Alfonsa shed tears of sentiment.

After the second Infant Jesus came a silver cross carried by Rogelio Garcia, who was accompanied by Paco Camacho and Don Lotario Rodriguez, to relieve him of the pious task when it should become necessary. The peak of their excitement was drawing near, and the women covered their heads with their outer skirts as a sign of reverence.

"There she comes! . . . There she comes! . . ." whispered the crowd, craning their necks and standing on tiptoe.

When the image of the Virgin appeared out of the dark

depth of the door, the musicians, suddenly enlivened, began to play a caricature of a "Royal March." A soft odour of incense, coming from the church, spread through the square, and overwhelmed by the solemnity of the occasion many of the spectators fell upon their knees.

Marta Santoyo and Lolita, the piano student, who were that year the maids of honour to the Virgin, and had kept watch over her all night, had dressed her in her most beautiful white tunic, and the sublime image, well dusted and refreshed, seemed to live, to walk on her own feet on the platform. One might think that she was anxious to escape from the sad, dark church, where she had been confined for a twelvemonth. She was so pretty, so smiling, and appeared so eager to run over the fields, that the crowd broke out again into deafening hurrahs, and again the rockets tore convulsively into the pale blue of the heavens.

The procession had stopped. Some of the well-to-do townsmen always coveted the honour of carrying the platform of the Virgin for a few minutes, and in the presence of Don Bernardo and Don Cirilo the auction of the posts began. The two front posts were valued the most.

"I give half a bushel of wheat," said some one.

"I give two," answered Ciriaco "El Migao."

"I'll match that!" replied the first bidder.

"The deuce, I give three!" exclaimed Ciriaco turning purple.

There was a silence; the bidders vacillated. To draw them into the contest, Don Cirilo repeated with a clear voice:

"Some one offers three bushels. . . . God will know how to be grateful to you, Ciriaco! Some one has offered three bushels. Three bushels, one! . . . There is some one, I repeat, who offers three bushels, two! . . . Come gentlemen, bid right out, the Virgin deserves more than that."

Some one, with an effort, said:

"I give four!"

"I give five!" replied Ciriaco angrily.

"Take it!" exclaimed the mayor.

Through this victory, the son of "El Migao" was entitled to carry the right front post, which was the one of highest honour, and to the rest of the bidders belonged the other three.

Again the procession continued its crawling progress towards the town hall. Behind the Virgin's platform, which was the largest, walked the musicians, and closing the cortège came the four men of the Civil Guard.

A few minutes later the procession stopped again, and after a second auction the carriers of the platform were replaced by the four new successful bidders. This substitution accomplished, Don Bernardo again took the vanguard of the mystical convoy. The picture was extremely animated: through the whole length of the inclined street, the crowd, divided into two files, flattened against the fronts of the houses; from the balconies hangings of various colours fluttered; crackling skyrockets, almost invisible in the sunlight, twisted like serpents; the musical outrages of the band spread the gaiety of a fair day; and down the street, covered generously with stones and holes, the images and crosses oscillated with grotesque wobblings. From time to time, when the Virgin passed, the hand of a woman would throw a little bunch of flowers from a window.

In front of the café new pretenders to the privilege of humiliating themselves under the sacred platform, stopped the procession again. They also bid for the handbarrow of the Infant Jesus.

"I give half a bushel of barley for the front post!"

"I give one!"

"Two!"

Don Cirilo could not hide his pleasure. Among the neutral lookers-on, who were many, were Don Diosdado and Hernandez Halcon, at whom the priest looked aggressively. He

knew they were making fun of him, and this dampened his joy.

Barral approached him, and in a low voice, as if he were afraid of making a mistake, said:

"How do you come to take out two Infant Jesuses?"

"Because we have two . . ."

"What a blunder!"

Don Cirilo looked at him severely:

"What do you mean?"

"Why, anyone can see! . . . You have just suggested to me something very confusing. Two Jesuses! . . . Then how many children did Saint Joseph have? . . ."

Shaken by anger, Don Cirilo turned his back on him without answering.

Pleased with his joke, Don Diosdado told it to the doctor But Don Blas did not laugh at it; as always, the things that struck the chemist as funny were looked upon by his friend from a serious angle.

"All this is shameful," he said, "shameful! Unfortunate country! Does not the good faith with which these numbskulls scramble to carry a wooden toy make you indignant? It makes me furious, it unhinges me entirely! If Christ should come to Carrascal del Horcajo He'd drive Don Cirilo from the temple at the tip of a lash, for being worse than the money changers. What that priest is doing represents the most infamous trading, the vilest traffic in sentimentality. Trading with the Virgin! . . . Why the devil don't you do me the favour of getting angry at least once? . . . Do you think it should be tolerated that the Most Pure, who a half hour ago left the church without a penny, should return tonight to her house, which is God's, loaded with money, like a cocotte?"

Taking the left bank of the Vaquerizo, the procession went towards the convent of Saint Clara, into whose chapel it was to enter for a few minutes. The pious cortège, which had been increased by numerous pilgrims on the way, made

a black blotch on the road, becoming smaller or larger according to the accidents of the ground. The music stopped, the crowd ceased its acclamations, and the procession went off into the distance quietly, becoming smaller as it dropped into the valley, as though swallowed by its wide expanse. Stark Mound and the Hill of Fatigue, in whose watersheds the snow seemed like sheets stretched out to dry, gave the valley a strong, wild beauty. The ruins of the village, the cypresses of the graveyard, the leafless trees, the rivers which wended their way silently, the blanched fields furrowed by the plough and hardened by the frost, all mixed in a grandiose harmony of prostration and renunciation. Across the bare dry earth the procession spread hope, and the Virgin, dressed in white and blue, wavering like a flame on her platform, seemed a token, a bridge of consolation between the infinite pain of living and the alleviating illusion—so doubtful and remote—of the hereafter.

In front of the convent a few pious people bid again for the honour of taking the images into the chapel, after which, when mass ended, Don Cirilo, the mayor, and "Don Profundo" went off and in a crevice of the ground which protected them from the cold and the curiosity of the people, sat down and began to lunch on the food they had brought in knapsacks. The majority of the pilgrims did the same, in groups, on the grass which served at once both as couch and table; and the mysterious repose of the fields covered them again. The silence of the earth stilled their souls. Meanwhile inside the convent, nuns sang, and the faint sound of their voices, like those small oil lamps which twinkle in front of the mystery of the altar, spread over the people a resignation at once sad and sweet.

At three o'clock in the afternoon the procession was reorganized and, following a path which crossed the fields obliquely, went towards the mill of the Santoyos. Celedonio Rionda, indignant at Don Cirilo for having listened to the miller's request, returned to town, deaf to all the reasons

advanced by Perez Cadenas and "Don Profundo" to make him stay.

When Manuel Santoyo saw the procession drawing near he experienced an ineffable emotion, so new and strong that he thought his breath was leaving him. For months previously, after Martin's imprisonment, he had lived very bitter days; he thought his son irrevocably lost, and gave up as frustrated all the hopes which he had founded on him. Then his optimistic pride lifted his spirits, and he began to say here and there that if he did not kill his brother-in-law it was because he did not want to leave his sister Irene a widow, and that he would soon manage to have Martin set free, even if to do so he would be reduced to begging alms. When the feast of the Conception was approaching—one of the greatest days of the Church—he remembered the devotion with which his oldest son offered the most beautiful flowers of his rose bush to the Most Pure, and how, before having fought with Cayetano, he went to say good-bye to her and to give her his scapulary, and thinking about this, he conceived the hope that the Most Holy Virgin, pitying him who had preferred to kill than to perjure himself, would set the prisoner free.

Domitila, whose eyes looked blacker as her worn-out face became yellower and more wrinkled, shared this belief and it was she who made him see Don Cirilo and pay him whatever he should ask to bring the Virgin to the mill.

One does not ask of the Virgin anything logical or just. On the contrary, of her limitless mercy people expect the arbitrary, the absurd, what will momentarily interrupt the eternal natural order of things. Of the Virgin one expects the impossible: that she should give light to the blind, health to the paralytic, warmth to the heart of the dying, and freedom to prisoners.

Over all that should not be, fanatical souls place the infinite piety of "her who never sinned." When man cannot

triumph over Reason or Natural Law, he seeks refuge in a miracle.

To believe in miracles is a definite manifestation of human pride. To defeat the Amorites, Joshua asked God that he should lengthen the duration of the day, and God heard him, and the sun stopped for the length of "a day." And if the Supreme Creator did this, why cannot the Virgin, more compassionate than He, hear her despairing children who, on their knees, agonized by pain, beg her help? . . .

Yes! Domitila and Manuel were certain that the Most Pure, seeing them so old and so sad, would give Martin back to them. . . . And so their excitement and their joy were so great that it stifled their breathing.

Informed that the procession was going to pass by the mill, the work was interrupted and all the hired help came en masse to the road. Leandro, Petra, and their children watched the scene from the height of the pond, near the water wheel which partly hid them. Manuel, surrounded by his family, had come out onto the porch from the cane and wire trellis of which the dry branches of the dead rose bush still hung accusingly, and never before were his face or his trembling hands so pale.

When those who carried the posts of the platform stopped some fifty feet from the house, the inhabitants of the mill knelt, and Domitila, with a humility so intense that the whole cortège was impressed, kissed the earth twice. The old woman, usually cruel, yet at that moment so deserving of pity, prayed rapidly.

And as soon as she had ended her prayer, she began to plead, more with her thoughts than with her lips:

"Virgin of the Immaculate Conception, Queen of Heaven, save my son! . . . Save him from the trouble he has gotten into through love of You, my little Mother! . . . Give me back my son, my Martin, Holy Virgin; he is of all my children my favourite! Take him out of the prison in which his faith in God has thrown him! . . . Bring him

back to me. . . . May I see him coming along that road tomorrow! . . ."

Beside his wife, Manuel Santoyo, also on his knees, prayed fervently, his arms crossed on his breast, his eyes lowered, while the Virgin, in the position she was placed, seemed to be looking at the mill.

The miller took two short minutes for his prayer. Getting up then, with a slow, assured stride, he approached Don Cirilo and heartily shook his hand.

"May God reward you for your kindness!" he said.

With quick nods of the head he greeted Perez Cadenas, Don Bernardo, and the secretary of the Council, avoided looking at Don Lotario, and coming near the priest, gave him, without ostentation, but also without hiding it, five hundred pesetas in bills. After which, with a preoccupied expression, he went back into the house.

The procession had started again towards the town, and for a long time the people who remained at the mill saw it receding into the distance. In the doubtful clarity of the twilight, the cloaked figures of the cortège became confused with each other, forming a dark blur in the midst of which the images, going over the uneven ground, tottered comically on their platforms and seemed to be chasing one another.

At the entrance to the town a few people surrounded the priest. They all wanted the same thing, that the Virgin should stop in front of their houses for a few moments. Attentive to his business and eager to promote the piety of his parishioners, Don Cirilo displayed a readiness to please everybody. Tired but happy, that great administrator of divine pity could not deny his dispensation to anyone.

Old man Jenaro's wife was sick, and he had forced her to come to the window so that the Virgin might look at her and heal her with her compassionate eyes.

"I'll give her ten reals for that," he said. "All I have."

"Of course, my man," answered Don Cirilo, sighing; "we shall have our Most Holy Mother look at your house.

Give me the ten reals. It's hardly anything, but we are all poor and must help each other."

A relative of Don Isidro wished to free his son from military service, and to obtain this he begged the favour of the Virgin.

"Take her to my house, Don Cirilo," he begged, "I'll give a thousand reals for the visit!"

"Very well, my good man, don't worry, we'll go. But before that we must go by Rionda's house; his son, you know, is sick. There is time for everything."

In this way, called upon by everybody, the devout image went through many streets, stopping each moment, her face always turned towards the pain she had to alleviate. It was well past nine in the evening when, haltingly, as if her divine feet ached, she returned to the church.

The café was crowded almost to capacity. The men, frozen, tired of walking, had gradually dropped from the procession, one at a turn of a corner, another behind a jutting wall.

That night Don Blas and the chemist were having their coffee together. Commenting on the events of the day, before Don Graciano and some others, the pharmacist talked more eloquently than ever.

"Either I have lost my wits," he said, "or there are no saints. And if there are any, they are quietly eating the bread of celestial happiness without worrying much about us. Because, gentlemen, if we are to be frank, we must admit that today's pilgrimage, though it might have been as picturesque and edifying as you will have it, absolutely lacked all practical result. And why is that? . . . Simply because it is illogical, and what is illogical is sterile, meaningless, useless, like a stone thrown into the air. Let us not comment on the sinful greed with which our curate gathers in the money of his parishioners. Let us speak only of the indiscretion with which he has proceeded. If he believes in good faith that the Virgin listens to our prayers—let us grant that

—I can understand how he should take her to Rionda's house, for example, or to the mill of the Santoyos, if that is his pleasure or his interest. But to take her to both places is to play juggling tricks with absurdity."

"You are right," whispered the doctor darkly, as if disgruntled. "You are entirely right! . . ."

"Because if, as is natural, Celedonio Rionda and his wife beg the Virgin that she hang Martin, and Manuel and Domitila, on the contrary, pray to her that she save him . . . what is Our Lady to do? A miracle? . . . It would hardly be fair, for the parents of the criminal are as worthy of pity as those of the victim. Will she then perform two miracles? Not that either, for the undeniable reason that the second would annul entirely the efficiency of the first. Therefore we are left with the conviction that Don Cirilo has swindled us. . . ."

The chemist was saying this when Paco Camacho appeared, so tired and exhausted by the efforts he had made in carrying the cross, that he looked like a ghost.

"Has the masquerade ended already?" asked Barral brusquely.

The inventor, avoiding an argument with his brother-in-law, made a gesture of exhaustion.

"My dear fellow," he muttered, dropping into a chair, "each one has his beliefs . . . do you see what I mean? . . ."

He rested a few minutes, drank some water, and said:

"Agueda has reappeared. . . ."

This piece of news changed the direction of the conversation.

"We didn't know that!" exclaimed Don Blas. "Where is she?"

"Well . . . I really don't know, because she has gone away again, do you see what I mean? It seems that when she left the mill she spent the night in the open, and the following day she went to the house of an old beggar

woman, daughter of Don Lotario's wet nurse, who lives in 'Los Cigarrales.' She lived with her some four or five days, until the old woman, who has barely enough to eat for herself, asked her to leave. Then she went about begging on the roads, and sleeping where she could. And at last, through hunger, she returned to her father's house. As her brothers and father were in the procession, she found the door locked, and had to sit down on the steps until their return. Those who saw her say that she had thrown her outer skirt over her head so that she wouldn't be recognized. The unfortunate girl thought that Don Lotario, after giving her a good hiding, would forgive her. But she made a big mistake, do you understand me now? . . . No sooner had her father seen her than he threw himself on her like a wolf, and kicked her to the ground."

"What a beast!" roared the chemist, unable to contain himself. "Had I been there I would have split his head with my cane!"

"Those who told me of the scene," continued Camacho, "assured me that it was frightful. The women who were present began to beg him to have mercy, but the men did not dare interfere, afraid that Don Lotario would go for them too. Fortunately Ciriaco "El Migao" appeared, and held the teacher, while some of the women helped the girl to get up, and took her into a nearby house. I have been asking about her, but no one has been able to tell me where she has gone to. They say that she left the town again."

They were talking about this when Don Lotario, with ill-tempered mien, his badly shaven face still pale from anger, entered the café. When Barral saw him enter, flushed with ire, he stood up on his left leg.

"You can't sit at my table!" he exclaimed. "I forbid you to! . . . I also forbid you ever to give me your hand again. That hand with which you threw your daughter from your house you can give to the hangman! . . ."

These words were followed by a dramatic silence. All

those present had stood up, curious to see what was going to happen. Disconcerted, the teacher tried to answer:

"I know what I'm doing and don't have to give explanations to anyone. If you believe that kindness means letting our daughters play ducks and drakes with our homes . . . that's your look-out! . . . My mission is to educate!

"A daughter that goes wrong," replied Don Diosdado, "should be received, should be sheltered, should be helped out of the shameful situation into which her innocence, or perhaps the outrageous assault of a soulless bandit, threw her; she should be so treated that her pain should serve as a lesson to others. You're a criminal! . . ."

"Don't you insult me, I'll not put up with it!"

"It will be the worse for you if you don't, because I'll give you the beating of your life!"

Don Lotario gnashed his teeth.

"You'll beat me?"

"Yes sir, so I will! Whenever you want it. You don't know the strength which having right on my side gives me."

"How do you know who's in the right now? I put honour above everything."

"But whoever told you, you ancient numbskull," shouted the pharmacist truculently, "that your honour rests with Agueda, and much less where you expect her to have it? . . . If you had taught her to read and write, if you had cultivated her intelligence a little, probably the unfortunate child would not find herself where she now is. And to cap it all you give her a brutal beating! You coward! . . . That courage of yours you should vent on Manuel Santoyo, her seducer, as everybody says around here. Not against the victim. Blows after horns! . . . No, Señor Mule-Driver . . . it's not the despoiled one but the despoiler whom you should punish! . . ."

With many other retorts equally pointed, Barral so nettled his opponent that, intimidated by the daring and greater culture of the chemist, he did not know how to answer.

"Unfortunate Spain!" sighed Don Diosdado sitting down again, closing the incident, "in the hands of such teachers is your destiny!"

Kindly, Paco Camacho approached Don Lotario, whose ears were red.

"Don't you think it's time to go? I'll go with you," he said.

Don Lotario consented. Thus, protected by the inoffensive person of the inventor, he left the café.

XIV

THE death of Don Isidro Perez Cadenas, parsimonious even in his gestures, was as peaceful and quiet as his life. Since the feast of the Immaculate Conception his health had been poor, and on Christmas day, during supper, a weak spell suddenly forced him to rest his elbows on the table. Doña Gerarda advised him to take a few sips of water, and he did so. Feeling better, he began to peel an orange, his favourite fruit, when suddenly the knife dropped out of his hands as if an invisible force had wrenched it from him; his body slumped heavy and lifeless against the back of the chair, and his face turned towards the ceiling, his mouth half open and eyes closed, in that expectant attitude with which some corpses seem to recall what they have lived through.

Uttering a low cry his daughter ran to help him:

"Papa! . . . Papa!"

But he did not answer, for that very minute, furtively and as if on tiptoe, his soul had departed.

Violently hated by some, despised by others, his death moved no one, and the chemist, who spent his life trying to attach a caustic commentary to the most serious events, wrote the doctor congratulating him in the name of "the enchained ones" for having freed Carrascal del Horcajo from its little political boss.

"Even I," he wrote, "compassionate as I am, I, who return good for evil like the myrtle, which smells more fra-

grantly the more it is rubbed, cannot but be grateful to you for the alacrity with which you took Don Isidro off. You are a magician . . . and your last prescription meant to weaken his heart, which I had the honour of filling, was surely a lucky stroke. Now what you must do, my friend, is to finish your good work of disinfection by doing away with Doña Gerarda, whom I aided many years ago in the destruction of one of the acacias of the square of Saint Martin, a crime which still weighs heavily on my conscience. . . ."

Notwithstanding the lack of popularity of the deceased, his funeral, which was to take place the day following his death, would have been well attended had the news not spread throughout the town that Antonio "El Migao" had just been crushed to death by a pine tree.

On the preceding day "El Migao" had begun to chop down one of the best trees in the town's pine woods. The townsfolk who took part in the cutting paid the Council three reals, and had the right to take away with them as many of the branches as could be loaded at one time on an animal. For this purpose each one brought his best mule, and there were people who returned home with five or six hundred pounds of firewood.

It was because of his avarice in trying to get the best part of the tree for himself, that "El Migao" met his death. They were cutting a very thick tree, when he and his sons arrived at the place. The guard, in charge of keeping the crowd at a safe distance to avoid mishaps, was careless and did not see them approach. Without warning, the tree, which appeared stronger than it was, fell in an unexpected direction, and killed the old man. The whole town came to the place of the accident to see his corpse, which had been almost driven into the earth, face down.

"But who would ever think of getting near a half-cut tree on a windy day?" commented some of the curious.

And others would add:

"It wasn't the wind that changed the direction of the

tree's fall, but its own branches. They brushed against those of the next trees."

These conjectures fanned the morbid curiosity of the townspeople, and deprived Perez Cadenas's funeral of all its lustre. "El Migao," with the lure of his tragic end, carried away the whole public, and the soul of the usurer must have looked on and suffered, because it was the first time that anything had ever been taken away from him.

These two doleful pieces of news reached the mill at the same time. Coming home for dinner Domingo gave them all the details. He and his brothers, obeying a mysterious impulse which moved them irresistibly, had gone to look at the body of the unfortunate shopkeeper turned purple from suffocation.

"They haven't pulled him out from under the tree yet," he explained. "They're waiting for Don Bernardo to go down to make out the official record. The whole town is there!"

Leandro and Petra were silent. For a long time now, their former good humour had left them, and their long silences were filled with gloom and distrust. Their moral depression sharpened their sensibilities and inclined them towards superstition.

"The year is ending up badly," said Leandro.

"It didn't bring so many good things with it," said Petra.

"That's true, not many!"

The miller remained quiet, his elbows on the table and his face between his hands, looking at his wife, as if lost in the pain of those grey hairs which he had kissed so often in his youth. Time! Paradoxical enigma which takes things away without removing them!

Petra mumbled, speaking to herself:

"April . . ."

Irene and Maria looked at their mother, and Leandro guessed immediately the secret connection between the desire to leave the place and what he had said about the harsh-

ness with which the year had treated them. Trying to fix a doubt which hovered in the air, he said:

"Yes, three months yet. It's better to leave for Buenos Ayres in the autumn."

"How I'd like to be on the boat!" exclaimed Irene.

Domingo burst out laughing.

"You silly! . . . Why, you haven't ever seen a boat."

"What does that matter? Aren't boats made to take us from one place to another? Well, all I want is to go away!"

No one spoke, and in the silence of the kitchen could be heard the comforting sounds of their eating. After a few seconds Maria said, shrugging her shoulders:

"Who knows what will happen to us!"

Leandro raised his head:

"Why do you say such things?"

"Because I think it will be very difficult to pull away from here."

"Shut up!" shouted Petra abruptly, as if her daughter's words struck her with fear. "Don't say such silly things. Hasn't your father decided that we shall go? Then we're going! That was all we needed! The Holy Virgin will protect his health, and while he lives, God will be with us."

Leandro was eating, deeply absorbed in his thoughts. He was brooding over Manuel's hostility, over the disappearance of Agueda, over the fact that this year, for the first time, his family and his brother's would not come together to celebrate Christmas evening, which evinced how thorough was the break between them; he remembered bitterly that Maria and Irene were not sought after, and had not had any one court them yet, on account, perhaps—as Barral had said—of their very beauty; and finally he pondered the tremendous new turn which, for the sake of his children, he was going to give to his destiny. To expatriate himself, to win for himself new friends, to cut new grooves for his activity in order to assure his children's future, to remake his life, was a terribly difficult task for a man already approach-

ing fifty-five. He was strong, true enough: his lungs, kidneys, stomach, and liver functioned like a young man's and when it came to mowing, excepting Manuel and Martin, there was no one who could equal him. He understood, however, that between the Leandro who returned from military service and the Leandro of the present, there was a vast difference, particularly in that which pertained to the spirit. His muscular strength might perhaps be the same; but his illusions, the courage of his soul, had cooled. In the battle of life the spirit is usually worn down before the body.

As usual, the supper ended that night in a melancholy mood. The whole family—Leandro, Petra, Maria, Irene, Domingo, and Justo, and even Bienvenida and Pedro, though still children—reflected, each according to his age and the light of his understanding, on the uncertainty of the morrow. What would become of them? And with their longing to get away, in the desolation of that corner of Castile, so similar in its flatness to the immense sea, they resembled eight shipwrecked travellers cast ashore, looking for help from the surrounding waste.

Manuel Santoyo had not yet learned of his brother's plans to leave. Since their talk about Agueda they had not spoken to each other. Day after day Manuel's character became more taciturn. The memory of Martin weighed upon him all too heavily, and predisposed him to anger. The Virgin had not answered his prayers, and her disregard made him furious rather than humble. He was frequently the prey to terrible fits of impiety.

"If the saints don't worry about our troubles," he would often repeat to himself, "they're not worth the money they cost us."

At other times his hatred was not addressed towards remote celestial patrons but againt Martin. For the very reason that he had loved his eldest son with all the savage violence of which he was capable, when his mind lingered over what Martin had done he felt like plunging a knife

into him to punish his stupidity. Stupid, more than stupid! . . . Martin had not attacked his cousin because he cut his rose bush, but because he had sworn to cut out his tongue. Imbecile! The adage teaches, "Let a bad oath fall on rocky soil!" That is to say, oaths need not be kept, if in keeping them we incur some grave danger to ourselves. Had he reflected on this, Martin would not now be rotting in a dungeon, without any chance of escape for a long time. No one else was responsible for his misfortune. The fault, the whole fault, was his, for having followed too faithfully the teachings of the catechism. The best proof that his action had not been pleasant in the eyes of God lay in the indifference which He had shown.

More fanatical, and perhaps harder of soul than Santoyo, Domitila on the contrary thought that Martin had acted as he should. She reasoned this way from personal experience. Before marriage she had had a friend of her own age, Maria de los Reyes, whom she had loved as a sister. They had always gone together, they often wore each other's best clothes, and their companionship was so close that it provoked gossip. When Domitila's mother died, Maria de los Reyes came to the house of the dead woman immediately upon finding out about it, and though her grief, a reflection of that which afflicted her friend, was very great, her eyes remained dry. Domitila observed this, and her swarthy face clouded with anger.

"Why don't you cry?" she asked her friend in a low voice.

"I can't, Domitila."

"Why is that? . . . Aren't you sorry that my mother died?"

"I'm terribly sorry. Please believe me. So sorry that I'd like to die myself. But I can't find tears; I don't know what's the matter with me. . . ."

Maria de los Reyes, who always cried easily, could not understand the sudden dryness of her eyes. Domitila

was silent for a few minutes, and then said, threateningly:

"You must try your best, Maria de los Reyes; I beg of you, for the sake of our love, please try! I want you to cry! . . . I must see you cry! . . . Otherwise I'll be angry. . . ."

The girl replied anixously:

"I can't; please, don't hurt me so . . . another day I'll cry . . . please, don't be angry with me, Domitila, please!"

Domitila turned her back on Maria. She approached the corpse of her mother, which was lying on a mattress on the floor between four candles, and thought:

"Mother, I swear to you that if Maria de los Reyes dies before me, I'll take her to her grave without shedding a tear."

Two years later Maria de los Reyes died of pneumonia and Domitila went to see her. In the vestibule several girls, friends of both women, embraced her and led her to where the corpse lay covered with flowers. Domitila, tragically distraught, murmured to herself:

"Mother, don't abandon me now, help me keep my oath."

Her heart was breaking with grief. Her breath left her. She had a vehement desire to cry, to shout, to free herself from that ghastly noose which she felt, each moment, tighter on her throat, but in spite of this, and though her wide black eyes were heavy with tears, she did not weep.

Fearing that the tension would do her grave harm, several of the girls supported her. Some offered her water, others begged her to cry.

"Cry, please, cry!" she could hear all around her. "Let your tears flow, and you'll feel much better, Domitila!"

But rigid, livid, her head thrown back, her lids partly closed, Domitila thought:

"Mother, don't abandon me; please don't or I'll lose my soul. Please help me in my difficulty, give me strength, give me courage. . . ."

Sustained by this fixed idea of her possible perdition unless she kept her oath, she did not cry. Then, keeping her oath to the end, she insisted on going behind the coffin to the graveyard, and to everybody's wonder, her staring eyes, hot and dry, as if inflamed by fever, did not shed a single tear. As a result of this ordeal of self-control she fell gravely ill.

Forty years later, remembering this episode, Domitila, an old woman with the parched profile of a quarter moon, excused her son's brutality on the same grounds.

The moral depression at the mill had come to be unbearable. The environment reeked of crime and hatred. From the time that Domitila had plunged her sister-in-law's hand into boiling water, the two women had not exchanged a word with each other. The sons of Leandro and Manuel did not talk to each other, and in the fields, in whatever tasks they might be occupied, they tried to work separately. And finally Agueda's flight, and the fight between Cayetano and his cousin, which kept Irene from the mill, were facts which contributed to make the evil doom that hung over the place more appalling.

Because of his low spirits and the hidden ire which gnawed at him without respite, Manuel Santoyo sought relief in the company of his wife, with whom he was more communicative now than ever before. Like the priest, a woman invites confession, and the miller unloading his troubles on his wife, experienced a rare relief. At night, when their children were asleep, the two came together to talk; she lying down, and he dressed, sitting on the edge of that bed which he had so often entered but never to sleep. Their favourite theme of conversation was Leandro. They detested him. Leandro was the tumour which, sooner or later, must be cut; the gangrened member which must be amputated for the good of the rest of the body; the condemned man whom society puts to death in the name of justice and public health.

"We were living quietly until my brother came," said Manuel. "You remember! . . . If, as I advised him, he had married Alfonsa, our life would have been prosperous and now I wouldn't be caught in this trap. He didn't pay any attention to me, loaded himself with children, and instead of helping us, he has weighed us down. He's a parasite. If I were to start naming all we have against him I'd never end. . . . The 'Mil Reales' incident, you know. . . . The night that 'Mil Reales' killed my mules, my brother and his contemptible hussy of a wife were both awake. . . . I know it because he said so himself at the café, and some one who was there came here and told me. The dirty skunk! . . . What do you think of that? He heard everything and couldn't get up to defend what he should have considered as much his own as mine! Or at least he could have waked me up and said to me, 'Brother, there are thieves about, you had better go out, because I don't dare to!' And I would have gone out and done what I had to! . . . He's nothing but a coward, a loafer, and a beggar. . . . And what about Agueda? To take a hungry slut from her house and bring her here for me to feed! And he did it to show off as a generous fellow too! . . . Then the girl goes and gets pregnant on us. I wouldn't be surprised if it was he who got her into trouble himself! . . . And lastly to cap all my bad luck, Martin's misfortune happens to us. That son of mine was my pride and my hope. Would you like me to tell you what I had had in mind for some time? What my brother did not do Martin would have done. Even though Alfonsa is fourteen years older than he, I had intended marrying him off to her. And now that her father has died, better still! . . . Damn my luck, for all I work and contrive, I don't seem to be able to get rich! . . . I swear to you that sometimes I feel I'll go crazy enough to take a knife, and one after another, kill off the whole damned brood of that rotten mother! . . ."

Following the winding of these ideas, from the fiery maze

of which he could not escape, his monologue invariably led him into theological fields.

"And the Virgin! . . . What can you say for her! . . . To pray to her all this time for nothing! . . ."

This irreverence frightened Domitila, who nervously began to make the sign of the cross.

"Be quiet, unhappy man! . . . Close that impious mouth of yours, or it'll be our damnation yet! . . ."

"Perhaps miracles don't happen any more, then?"

"Holy Jesus! Blessed Virgin of the Immaculate Conception, order this man to shut his blaspheming mouth, before we're lost! . . ."

"But how much trouble do you think it would be for Our Lady to appear before Martin in his dreams and explain what he needs to do to escape? Or better still, to take him out of the jail herself, wrapped in a cloud? . . . More wonderful things than that, you know, fill the holy books! . . ."

"You're right," said the little woman, "and that's the reason why we should not lose faith in God. Martin is good, and only sinned for the love of God, and He knows it. God isn't indifferent to those who risk their lives for the sake of His service. I think it's this way, Manuel. The second commandment orders us not to take the holy name of God in vain, and the fifth says, 'Thou shalt not kill.' But it's clear, at least that's the way I see it with my small understanding, that to kill is less serious than to perjure yourself, for, either I'm very stupid, or the commandments are given in the order they're to be followed. So let's have confidence in God, who knows everything and knows better than we when and how things must be done. I may be old, but I haven't yet lost hope of embracing my Martin once more before I die . . . Rest assured of that!"

Soothed by these trivial yet sweet words, the miller sighed:

"May God hear you! . . ."

She went on in a monotonous voice, as if she were praying:

"The world doesn't tire of turning around, and what seems most tangled up suddenly gets unravelled and turns out for the best. The proverb says: 'At the end of a hundred years the king becomes a bumpkin, and at the end of one hundred and ten the bumpkin becomes a king.' All this is ordained by God. We'll continue here enduring our trials, and suddenly one of these days we'll hear that our Martin has been pardoned or has escaped, and it will be because the Most Holy Virgin has touched the heart of the judges who are going to try him, or because one night she will open the door of the prison where our son is sleeping."

The day of Saint Silvester, the last of the year, no one worked at the mill of the Santoyos. Shortly after dawn, Leandro and his family in one group, and Manuel and Domitila and theirs in another, went off to mass.

At the moment of crossing the square of Saint Martin the miller unconsciously looked towards the balcony of Doña Gerarda and noticed with surprise that, though it was Thursday, and therefore stagecoach day, neither Alfonsa nor the widow of Perez Cadenas was there. It was no doubt their being in mourning, rather than a lack of desire to peep and gossip, which had interrupted their eternal vigilance.

On entering the church Don Cirilo, who arrived at the same time, stopped to greet him:

"Are you sick?" asked the priest.

"No. Why do you ask?"

"You look pale. For the last two months at least you have been looking that way."

Alarmed by these words, Domitila raised her head. Don Cirilo was right. It was a long time, years in fact—on account of her shortness, and her custom of obeying him without replying—since she had looked directly at his face. And now, all at once, she found him old and discoloured,

his eyebrows greying, and his clear eyes almost the same colour as his cheeks.

The miller shrugged his shoulders and impatiently rubbed his face.

"You are not the first one," he replied, "to tell me the same thing. And yet I feel well, and since I never look in the mirror . . ."

Their prayers ended, Manuel, Domitila and their daughters went to Marta's house and stayed for dinner. Mateo and his brother had gone off to hunt rabbits. Towards evening, all of them, separately, returned to the mill again. Almost at the same time Leandro's sons returned in a group. Irene, Maria, and their mother had decided to spend the night with Rionda's wife, who was sick. Leandro was eating at Barral's house.

As usual, the family of Manuel Santoyo had their supper first. While Domitila, assisted by Monica, prepared the repast, the others, silent and sleepy, sat near the fireplace, for the cold was intense. Manuel, his hands crossed at his back, his gaze on the ground, walked rapidly and nervously from one end of the kitchen to the other.

A stormy gust of wind moaned down the chimney and made the light of the candle waver. On the fire a few flakes of snow fell.

"Well! That was all we needed," exclaimed Matias; "it's snowing!"

Mateo got up, opened the back door slightly, but quickly closed it again.

"Bad night for the carrots and turnips still in the ground," he observed.

"Is it snowing much?"

"As if it had never snowed before."

"With the cold of this afternoon and the colour of the sky we couldn't expect anything else," replied Matias.

The wind, suddenly unleashed, seemed to embrace the house and shake it, as if trying to wrench it from its founda-

tions. A far-off whining came from the travail of the trees, lashed by the blast. The doors and windows rattled in their frames.

"If the winter continues the way it's started," said Monica, "the wolves will soon be coming into town."

"That's right."

"Last night I heard them howling."

When Domitila served supper conversation ceased. Grouped around the table, each one devoured his ration in silence. Manuel ate walking to and fro. Affected by the air which at intervals whirled in through the fireplace the flame of the candle flickered larger or smaller, throwing extravagant shadows on the walls and ceiling.

From the olive orchard came a furious howling. They all raised their heads at the same time and attentively tried to guess what the sounds might mean. Santoyo stood still.

"Bad year for the dogs!" said Matias.

Domitila exclaimed:

"It hasn't been any too good for any of us."

This retort was followed by a sad silence. Over all of them the memory of Martin cast its shadow. They all thought at once: "What is he doing now?" And this mute interrogation was answered by several sighs, badly repressed. Monica rubbed her eyes with her hands so that the tears should not fall on the food. Domitila exclaimed:

"The truth is that I don't want to remember this year. Let it go with God!"

Manuel Santoyo looked at the old woman.

"As long as it doesn't bring us any more pain . . ."

"Keep quiet, man, don't talk that way. Fear brings misfortune. What possible evil can this year still bring us when it has only four hours to go? . . . Isn't it eight o'clock? . . . You ought to know it's a sin to believe in witchcraft."

"Of course. But it's just as true that this accursed year hasn't ended yet, and 'There's many a slip betwixt the cup and the lip,' " replied the miller.

He continued his vigilant walk, the walk of a man who foresees something ominous.

By ten everybody was asleep at the mill except Manuel. He was of late constantly troubled by insomnia, which instead of weakening him seemed to double his strength. He never slept longer than five hours, and even then very lightly. In that subtle, transparent half-sleep, his obsessions stood about him, waiting for him to wake, to spring at him again, and he knew it even in his sleep. He felt them plough through his brain, thick and obstinate, with the heaviness of material things. Sometimes, as if these ideas enjoyed a separate life within his mind, he begged them to leave him alone. "Go, let me rest a little longer," he would entreat them; "we'll talk later, it's too early yet. . . ." To frighten them off he would toss right and left on his bed, and put a blanket over his head. . . . Useless effort; the watchers did not leave him. Abruptly he would open his eyes, tired of trying to keep them closed, and instantly all his schemes and all his rancours would re-emerge in his mind to delve even deeper into him and bury themselves again in his heart.

Rendered even more than usually sleepless by the vague superstitions of the closing year, Manuel Santoyo got up from the empty sacks on which he was lying and, thinking that the fresh air would ease his maddening restlessness, as it had often done, he went out onto the balcony.

The wind and snow had ceased, and by virtue of one of those sharp atmospheric changes so frequent on the high and hard Castilian plateau, the sky was quickly recovering its starry clarity. Under the light of the stars the plain, dressed magnificently in ermine, diffused a spectral luminosity against which the monastic cypresses marking the road to the cemetery stood out with a black and haunting vigour. Towards the south, in the confusion of the snow-covered roofs of the town, two lights shone, the pharmacy and the inn, and in the opposite direction stood Stark Mound, desolate

and white against a dark background, and the Mound of Fatigue crested by its tower, which looked, under the favour of a smiling quarter moon, like a silvery thimble.

Manuel Santoyo stared into the distance and then at the foreground, as if wishing to forget himself. The snow had effaced the roads and filled the irrigating ditches. In the brimming pond the water had frozen, and its mirror had the turbid darkness of a dead eye. On the wheel of the well, the buckets topped with snow looked like white bee-hives.

Manuel left the balcony, lit a cigarette, remained for a few moments undecided, not knowing whether to go to bed or not, and went out again. The chill of the night, and even more its white majesty, calmed him.

"What is the matter with me?" he asked himself; "why am I so nervous?"

And later he thought:

"Perhaps Martin has escaped. . . ."

The desire to explain his restlessness suggested to him the most extravagant conjectures. He looked towards the well, whose windlass, resting on the ground, preoccupied him he knew not why. Around this centre his ideas began to focus capriciously.

"The well," he meditated, "nourishes whatever may be around it. It goes for water to the depths of the earth, and then distributes it. The well is like a mother, and the water is its blood, its milk—which it seems to give with most pleasure when the drought is worst. Now the well is dead, and the spring in the pond is frozen. I'm like that well; near it I was born and near it I'll die, and like it I have spent my life turning round and round to wrench from the earth's bowels what others were to consume. Round and round! . . . And my children getting stronger and older, and more and more independent, but I, year after year, the same or worse. That's because the people around me don't love me as they should. They are the pond into which I

have poured my sweat, and that pond has also become frozen with the thickest ice of ingratitude."

All those for whom, year after year, he had given the best of his strength trooped rapidly through his memory. Modesto had just obtained his licentiate in law and was on the editorial staff of an important newspaper in Madrid. Marcos would next year end his course in medicine. Marta no sooner married than she seemed to have forgotten her parents; Matias and Mateo, in obedience to Time's laws, would soon be seeking to shake off his authority. Monica, being selfish and lazy, was attracted by the life of the convent; Macaria now had a sweetheart; Matilde had already begun to show signs of independence, young as she was. He also thought about Martin again, and then about Leandro and his nephews who never had been on his side, and had never helped him in the least, as he had expected them to. He, Manuel Santoyo, was the prolific well which irrigates, and turning interminably on itself, becomes exhausted and dries up. They were the pond, passive and frozen; they were the tomb of his efforts.

These considerations disturbed him deeply. There are moments when a man's cowardly conscience refuses to penetrate into his heart, converted by chaotic lusts into a den of wild beasts. Such was, at that moment, Santoyo's moral disposition. He felt exploited, neglected, and that conviction seared him with flames of hatred. At the end of the road he found himself alone, his children, one after another, slowly abandoning him, and his wife, no longer fertile, old and ugly, without interest for him. But since he could not go back on the companion in whose womb life had caught so often, nor on those beings whom his love had brought into the world, who were flesh of his flesh, all his hatred turned against his brother. In the family of Leandro, not in his own, was the pond, the still, dead water whose frozen surface he must break.

Nothing so much impels to murder as a fierce desire to

live, and this emotion now swung the miller's mind back again to the fratricidal idea which he had so often entertained and which was like a stone wall in his heart.

When he experienced anew the terrible shock of that hidden intent, an instinctive gesture of horror made him put his hands to his cold face; and then he realized why Don Cirilo had thought him so pale that morning. He remembered that on the night of the first of November, while the little oil lamps, lit in the mill for the souls in Purgatory, flickered mysteriously, he had sat in the kitchen and resolutely considered the advantage of murdering Leandro. Since then many people found him pale and changed, that pallor being the physical expression of his desire to kill.

Without his noticing it, this desire had become more concentrated and clearly defined with time, for hatred's fruits above all others take time to ripen. When Manuel Santoyo began to realize that his brother was an obstacle in his way, he used to exclaim:

"If he would only go away! . . ."

But much later he was startled by the thought:

"If he would only die!" . . .

Finally this fratricidal attitude became so familiar a thing to him that he used to say to himself, without euphemisms:

"As soon as I kill him! . . ."

And in this way words, at first hideous, then frank and precise, slowly took on in his mind the aspect of an accomplished fact.

The thought that he was getting on in years, instead of moving him to resignation and making him let go his hold on things, spurred his desire to use his future, already so short, to better advantage than he had his past. How long would he continue to give half of his work to that lazy gang of nephews? . . . He needed that money for his daughters' dowry, when they would marry; to set Modesto and Marcos up, who seemed to be ambitious and worthy lads; and finally he wanted to keep it for himself, because it was his own.

From these thoughts he went on to think of Martin, whom he loved more than any of his other children, because Martin resembled him so much. The mill, all his land, all the cattle —even his own soul!—he would give to get his boy out of jail. And Leandro was the remote author, the only author indeed, of his misfortune. . . . Because if Leandro had dropped contact with his sister and Celedonio Rionda as he himself had done, Cayetano would not have visited the mill and therefore would not have cut down the rose bush. Leandro was the cord by which the Devil was pulling the whole family to perdition! . . . "If he were here tonight," he thought, "I believe I'd kill him!"

He looked towards the sky, entirely clear now, and calculated the hour by the position of the stars. Soon it would be twelve o'clock.

"In a few moments the year will begin for me, for Manuel Santoyo," he thought. "I ought to be all alone. 'New Year, new life.' "

This idea of absolute dominion was occupying his mind, when far off, on the whiteness of the snow, he saw the dark form of a man. His stormy heart pounded within him. He had recognized his brother.

"One might say," thought Manuel, "that heaven was guiding him to me."

And immediately he said:

"Either now . . . or never. . . ."

He left the balcony, and without knowing exactly what he was going to do, he took out a hammer from a box in which he kept his carpentry tools. He descended the stairs silently, and went out onto the porch.

During the half minute which had just passed, a multitude of sinister purposes had become arranged with ghastly logic in his mind.

"With everyone asleep, this is my opportunity. I shouldn't give him time to get too near. The farther from here I kill him the better. I'll just give him a blow with the

hammer. One good one will be enough. And then I'll throw him in the pond, so that they'll believe he drowned himself. . . ."

The memory of the frozen water, of the solid crystal he had to break, came mysteriously into his mind.

Wrapped in his muffler up to the eyes, Leandro walked briskly. He had celebrated New Year's at the chemist's, and had then gone to Rionda's house for a few minutes, in case his sister or wife should need him for anything; then, worried about getting up early next day to go to work, he returned to the mill.

Nearing home he recognized Manuel in the middle of the road, seemingly waiting for him.

"What does he want of me?" he thought.

Don Diosdado had convinced him that Agueda's violator was Manuel. This knowledge filled him with hatred; but listening to the reasonable advice of the pharmacist and Clara Luz, he had resolved to act as if he did not know about it. When the consequences of the act which one wishes to punish are irreparable, silence is preferable to revenge. However, when he saw his brother there, so much master of everything, so sure of himself, his rancour revived in him and he wondered if he could restrain himself from insulting the traitor as he deserved.

Manuel Santoyo drew near him, happy to have found words with which to provoke him.

"Where are you going? . . ."

Leandro stopped, surprised.

"To sleep! . . ."

Manuel, who was wearing nothing over his vest, held both his hands on his belt, where he had hidden the hammer.

"You can't sleep here," he said.

"Why not?"

"Because this is no longer your house."

He took another step towards Leandro, coldly calculating the moment when he should attack so as not to give his vic-

tim time to defend himself. Leandro was looking at him astonished but unafraid, still without suspicion that these were his last few moments. The two men were only a yard apart.

Taking pleasure in humiliating his victim, Manuel said:

"Haven't they told you yet what I did to Agueda?"

This shameless question made Leandro shake with anger.

"Yes, they told me!"

"What do you think of it?"

"It was swinish!"

"I agree with you."

"Since Agueda was mine you might have respected her!"

"On the contrary, since Agueda was yours I abused her. And her, and all of yours, I'm going to kick out of this place!"

Before his brother had time to recover he sprang at him, and seizing him by the shoulders, threw him down with the whole weight of his body. Holding his brother's face against the ground, Manuel brought the hammer down powerfully against the base of his skull and knocked him unconscious. It was enough. For the moment he did not want to kill him, but only to stupefy him, so that he could later say Leandro had drowned himself. Manuel at once took hold of his wrist and, pulling at him, dragged him past the back yard. Over the silent snow Leandro's unconscious body slid quietly, his legs limp, his head fallen backwards, dangling and bleeding profusely.

When he arrived at the foot of the rising ground by the well, Manuel Santoyo tried to sit the prostrate man up. Holding him by the arm-pits, he tried with all his might to pull him up, but every time the body slid down again. It was a singularly eerie setting, in which those two dark bodies battled mutely like shadows, under the rain of light from the moon and the immense paleness of the fields.

The miller had already gained the height which rimmed the pond, when Leandro began to recover consciousness and,

though he could not speak, to sense that his fate was near. The instinct of self-preservation awakened in him, and awkwardly, without being able to control his movements, he tried to defend himself. Desperately, wildly, with fumbling violence, his hands—which Death was already beginning to chill—contracted convulsively, and sank their nails into the neck of the murderer, as if he were trying to hold on to life by gripping the very flesh, brother of his own, that was dealing him death.

Realizing that Leandro was becoming conscious, Manuel Santoyo crouched down, and putting his arms around the middle of the body, with a supreme effort he raised it in the air. Then Leandro opened his eyes and understood. His generous mind had no time to think of himself, but only of his wife and children, who would be outcasts without shelter. Manuel lifted him from the ground, pulling up the root that was noble, the disinterested and artistic one; and by this act the evil root remained triumphant, coursing with fratricidal sap.

In silence, firm on his lean, strong legs, Manuel took a few steps, and threw his load on the pond. The dying man fell heavily face up, and one of his arms remained stretched and rigid on the ice. The body, however, failed to break through the ice and sink, and this last hindrance drove the murderer to fury.

"Damn you!" he snarled between his teeth, "won't you ever give up?"

He broke the polished surface with a stone, and pushed his victim in such a way that he disappeared under the ice head first, and drowned without a struggle. Then he stood erect, satisfied and at the same time frightened by his deed. The mill slept. In the fields, filled with silence, nothing moved. Suddenly he began to tremble. From the depth of the moonlit pond, and through the immobile frozen surface as through the glass of a coffin, the eyes of Leandro seemed to stare at him, following his every movement.

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